

CHRISTMAS

Nanette Secor

I haven't talked to my mother in two years.
Thank you for the earrings, Mama—
old Chinese coins with jade balls.
I put them in my ears and go outside.

I pass an old woman, muttering on the street,
I *told* you. I imagine her taking a swing at me with her bag.

I saw my mother last in Asheville. It was spring.
I dreamed last night of the mountains around the town,
the three-quarter coin dropping to the west,
the branches of dogwood low and flat.

Don't ever have a child of your own, my mother
said in the dream. A tree with its earth ball
in a sack was outside my door in the morning;
a Baby Jesus on a tongue depressor in the hall.

That woman doesn't like me, I can tell.
She's my mother's age. She mutters at me,
I *told* you. I find a fortune cookie fortune
on the curb: *You're set back by blame*.

*We know ya'll don't see holly growing up there
much*, the card says in my mother's cheery hand.
Could I do better than that woman's done?
I'm graying and I don't reply to strangers.