NIKKI-LEE BIRDSEY

Augustland

I don't not love. The summer's dark
reveals what? The spider's threaded
retreat, the sea's output, inside me
the large swaths of water, the swamp-

colored eyes. How many north-facing
rooms have I sat in, explain-me how
the different apartments in which I've lived
have the same stains.

It's the "return of Saturn" now, planet
of my heart: melancholy, burnt moons,
vermillion bracelets. In the airport
all the signs reveal themselves:

I know you know we are all dead soon,
relatively speaking. Dead as the Cinnabon™
in the Walt Whitman rest stop on the Garden
State Parkway, reminding me of airports,

of aerial perspectives, of celandine,
of the "crime that is Europe."
My energy company is named Mercury,
but I need the lights on, *always*, and they laughed.

I walked away from New York City,
that song. In a half-dream
I still see your face, the fibrous light and
Arthur Russell's world of echo opening

up the walls. At times, everything really
does sound like it's underwater. Nothing
moves where we are, the quilted notes;
you should see the shapes I have been in.

It's uncanny how much no one cares about
the trees lining the Garden State Parkway,

the inexplicable scorch marks in Devil's
Forest. New Jersey is the state of Saturn.

Explain-me how Jesús's L.A. circles above me
tonight, he, standing below the white-painted arch,
the pink bougainvillia climbing, in real time, the stripes
over the swimming pool and the nodding

of privet berries in the wind. Does even
the dust glisten? I read a book in one
sitting that made me miss my cello.
Instruments can only travel next to you

or not at all. When I was born under the sign
of Saturn they changed my name and Saturn
claimed me. Saturn is the only planet with rings,
its circles move in every planet's logic; drawing

it all in with devastating tides. By now,
you remember Whitman wrote about a
spider. Back in Iowa, in the sleepless
heats of August, protean seeds, tornado sirens,

I punch a hole in the coat closet door
because the economy is bad and two years
previous my tuition was defunded.
American debt is timeless. The plains'

windflowers and wood anemones, colonial
houses with oval windows and undergraduates
in neon beneath them, and beneath that
my three-letter world is borderless:

For what is faster than my thoughts
when I'm like this? My uncle's nineteenth-
century orrery on a table in the apple orchard,
its glinting swings and levers whir in the wind,

its clicking symmetry perfect to him.
Damien and Chris said almost the exact

same thing so they must be right. The long durée,
just another goodbye in the night.

It's an August Tuesday and I can't heat
the house enough. I monitor the dehumidifier.
I don't leave the house to watch it and
the pigeons outside the bay window,

the insects as loud as New York City tonight.
I walk through the garden, my vision snowy
from the light but for the dappled shade of endless trees;
how wonderful, me beneath them.

I think of Saturn when I wake up to my own
scream and the recurring nightmare of a man
standing over my bed and I think about
when that started.

The moon magnified through
beaten glass. In time, you
still wake to the scream, but mostly,
you worry the neighbors heard you.

All the Augusts are rooting for you
even when you've managed to forget
nothing.