after Gabrielle Calvocoressi & Tom Andrews

The box spring smoldered in the dumpster the first time I died.
My father tore tissue into tissue tiny as drops of blood the first time I died.
I pushed the movie theater's back metal door out into the sunlight the first time I died.

There was the hissing mouth of the Canada Goose inches from mine the first time I died.
There was the marsh of cattails and rain and gnats and horseflies and mist the first time I died.
A bucket of bluefish – baby snappers – drowning on the warped wooden dock the first time I died.

I wanted to say he can't hurt us now the first time I died.
I helped her roll pink plastic tubes into her long bleached hair the first time I died.
Her eyes less brown than brown with flecks of green and amber and cheap clover honey if you look really close right before the first time you die.

She wanted to say he's far, far away the first time we died.
In the summer the box fan melted on the windowsill until we died.
In the winter the gas man came and we had no money and hid in the closet and she lit another cigarette and blew the smoke through the slats in the door until he died.

We slept in the car with the motor running and the heat at full blast the first time she died.
She took her kids to the eighteenth floor of the housing project where another nurse's aide lived and where he'd never think to look for us and she died.
She opened the oven door before sunrise and we sat before it rubbing our hands near the blue flickering flame until it died.

Neil Sedaka on eight-track tape the first time I died.
Neil Diamond on eight-track tape the first time I died.
We slept in the car and she lit a cigarette and thunder only happens when it's raining because no one admits it when they're only pretending to sleep.

I ate Reese's Pieces and a boy and his alien flew on a bike across the moon the first time I died.
I ate Charlie Chans and watched a man run and run on the beach toward Paris, France, or maybe it was Jerusalem, the first time I died.
She held my hand in the dark and a man named Rambo oiled his gun like each muscle of his body the first time I died.

My father picked me up in a car he called a Gremlin the first time I died.
My father pulled up slow in a small limousine and I wondered why we never see baby pigeons the first time I died.
The judge revoked custody is what I heard her say and I wondered if he could fit a small flock of Canada Geese in his limousine or if they would die.

Ronald Reagan shot in the armpit the first time he died.
Travis Bickle mohawked and mugging for the mirror the first time he died.
Mark David Chapman caressing the signature on John and Yoko's *Double Fantasy* and why did rat poison look like candy?

It was a hearse not a limousine my mother told me and she didn't know where he got such crazy ideas.
She didn't know the story of the boy who hid in the coat rack at Sears and who was beaten for nineteen minutes until someone called the police.
She didn't know and then she did

and when my father died
years later, he refused: the chemo, the radiation, the nurse, the doctors, the orderlies, the turkey and peas, the white walls and white curtains,
and his brother, I have heard, massaged his feet and read dog-eared passages of scripture on sheets of paper thin as my father's eyelids.

I didn't see it coming, the gray waves of the Atlantic rushing toward me, inside me, the undertow, then after blackness my father's proud arms around his boy who he had just taught to swim, even if it nearly killed him.
The first time I died I looked out from the tower at my city beneath me and could swear there was no way it could nearly fit inside both my palms.
When I died I heard your cry, I swear I did, my child, and I went to the windows of whatever we were lucky enough to dwell inside, and opened them, one at a time, and waited for the light that comes slowly, more slowly than we have been told, but comes

to show us we are living.