

Amanda Auchter

Tether

"I can't seem to love anyone," one birthmother said. "It's like I'm already in love," she said, "with someone I'll never meet."

—Karen Salyer McElmurray, from *Surrendered Child*

How much we give up for this
unnamable thing: love without

face, without name. Love, a nest filled with bones, umbilicus,
fingernails. Affliction. In her voice,

my birthmother is eighteen again, a bird

fluttering pain. An ocean
inside her, my foot

against spine. I'm tasting the bright air,
reach for any part of her before she lets go:

the knotted hair between her legs, wrists,
breasts. She listens as I make her into paper

dolls kept in a suitcase under my childhood bed,
how I name each one *Kathryn*, look

in shopping malls, the post office, for a woman

with dark curls, my mouth. When we speak,

I want to tether her with my red yarn tongue, say
I'm waiting, I've been

waiting, her body
a house burning in a distant field, smoke

rising between us. Love,
the rafters thick with soot. I'm waiting,

reliable as the silence

exploding between us, our lives
without each other a door we do not open.