Benign Protection

For Paula

In the late spring — June — before summer descends — haze and mirage my father’s death left a hole in the pattern — deep and unfathomable — I reached forward to make meaning and we met at your office Columbus Circle — the green park beckoning tourists, natives, and thieves — we walked to the restaurant — close by — whose name I can’t recall — a diner — on 57th Street in the cool dark booth the red leather banquettes menus sized like the Times I have always wondered how they cooked so many dishes in the hidden kitchen we have a glass of wine — white and crisp — order food that quickly comes and my missing father enlightened by death wore the 20th century like a map I am tracing the route in our conversation you lost your father at 14 — in the summer before 10th grade — we four met once in the cold moon starry winter on the corner of Marlborough and Church in front of the Temple Beth Emeth us, girls in our maxi coats — yours forest green and belted mine black, as every coat I ever bought — our fathers standing in benign protection — on the verge in my reckoning the ghosts of childhood remain incredulous and strong silent and long-suffering beautiful and awful as memory herself.

Anne Elizabeth Pluto