In the Car with the Theoretical Physicist

It’s hard to hear her—
not because she’s theoretical, but because of the dark matter between us, what takes up space but won’t engage with light. My jacket is black, she says, tugging on it, because it absorbs light. My muffler is loud and our being here together or anywhere, highly unlikely. Now she’s on a plane, now I’m at a table in Madrid. People are always leaving. We could call the five or six mass extinctions mass migrations, but still they would be sad. Everything moves too fast into the past and future. It’s hard to keep up, hard not to try to disguise my voice and call in to the radio station when the special guest is the theoretical physicist, hard not to ask: what should we do if we stumble into a black hole? Duck and cover? Roll with it? I’ll take my answer with a stiff drink, I say, and she laughs, which may be the only response adequate to all this falling.

—Andrea Cohen