

I See the Future in Your Mouth

There in the x-ray —your five-year old skull
a premonition of itself in the grave.
Behind each milk tooth the grown ones loom,
Tombstones askew, vying to be first to break
the gumline and mark the lost babies with no remorse

for making crooked the clean straight rows
measured as the meter of nursery rhymes
that trilled across their white surface.
Pressing your tender-smooth cheeks
I try to feel the harbingers of adulthood,

of the cutting ahead, some ghost braille
cells that spell your story, code I
cannot read. More solid than flesh they will lie
with you long after I stop sharing your pillow.
They will shape the words you form

your life with, language I only hope to understand.
Unkind reminders, lucky gatekeepers
of your breath. They will know you —
blood and bone, better than I—I who grew them in you while you grew in me--
they will guard your secrets, daughter, even to the grave.

Cert

My grandmother's blue raincoat takes me by surprise
Here in her closet behind dry-cleaner's plastic, the rip
In the pocket finally fixed. I remember her eyes

Finding me crouched behind the darkness of her perfumed dresses, my lip
Bit, eyes clenched (instantly invisible), broken beads ready to rain
From my clutched hands. But, innocent now, into the cuff I slip

My hand to find her—smooth nails, rings, the pillowy veins
She hated, wishing gloves still a must in ladies fashion. I tear
The clear sheath and look for missed stains

That might map the course we traveled—the root beer
Spill from lunch at Friendly's? Or just a shadow.
I press my face to the wide lapel but can't smell her L'air

Du Temps. Guiding my arms through the sleeves--too short--though
In the mirror I make her move again, feel her low
Voice in the warmth of the upturned collar,
In the pocket, a Cert, half-way to powder.

Daylily

I inspected the buds at night with my dad
to see which might bloom by morning,
always surprised by the red
or peach that burst forth from the heart
of the blossoms and enlivened the quiet
green bank. We made sure to get a picture;

they were only there for the day, but the picture
would stay. You think of becoming a dad
when I come home today as we sit in the quiet
kitchen smiling. You make toast in the morning,
ask how I feel, say you love me with all of your heart.
I laugh at your doting and ask for the red

berry jam, but you say there's no red
only black. Staring at belly I picture
how it will pop out and how the little heart
beat will get strong. I've been watching, like my dad,
for the daylilies, but it's early yet, only April this morning.
The green swords protect the roots; the top's pursed lips are quiet.

I leave the radio off and enjoy the quiet
drive to work. The coats of the thoroughbreds
steam; the rain has hushed the morning.
At lunch I visit the library, leaf through picture
books, ones I had as a child. A young dad
guides scissors as his daughter cuts a heart

from construction paper. *It's an I Love You Heart*,
she beams, forgetting the rule about quiet.
The father puts his finger to his lips; I see you as a dad.
When I go to the bathroom, I find a bright red
has filled the bowl. The doctor scans another picture,

but there is no longer the pulse of the first morning.

Blood comes heavy in the night, at morning
you're awake by my side. I lay my head on your heart,
and breath to its beat, remembering the small paper picture
and the glowing shape that was its center. Quiet
my hand in your hand; the red
blossoms on the sheet. Someday I'll make you a dad.

I remember the morning you thought you'd be a dad,
a picture of the future as clear as the coming red
or peach daylilies, before the heart went quiet.

