

## Sister Mary

Sister Mary brushes snow strands  
from her mother's frozen face.  
A single, silver thread. Burrows.  
into a winter-worn crevasse.

It roots below her icy-blue skin.  
Turns to twine, then twists to rope.  
Sister Mary prays and pulls. Tugs.  
And pries and yanks.

Her mother's memories tumble.  
Clinging. Like cat claws.  
To a concocted life. Spewing.  
Over. A bubbling witch's brew.

Sister Mary falls, crashing back to  
earth. A gaping hole blinks.  
Her mother's mouth froze. Open.  
Into a soundless scream.

Fallen, like apples. The memories  
plunk. And Sister Mary flees.  
A single, silky, silver strand. Stuck.  
Beneath her shoe.

The old woman propped in bed.  
Crooked. Like a raggedy doll.  
Picks at her memories. Cocooned.  
Stirring in her hands.

Some she flings to the floor. Some  
she nibbles and spits. Tired.  
She kicks them from her bed.  
Like so many toys.

To make room for sleep.

**In Attendance**

The oxygen machine keeps the rhythm in the room  
Plunk, then a long hiss, regular as a tocking clock.  
Her mouth gasps for air below caged eyes.  
We sit around her and count time between breaths.  
Tapping thumbs to fingers.  
Like we were kids again.  
One-two-three-four, another breath.  
We begin the count again.  
One of us is swallowing sniffles. I don't know who.  
Not me.  
Cell phones silenced, we whisper in this sacrosanct place.  
This used to be our living room. A dying room now.  
I can't hear their words across the bed.  
Over the plunk and hiss.  
Plunk and hiss.  
I think my hearing is going bad. Did she say something?  
I stick my ear to her face, and she recoils.  
I'm sorry, I say, hoping to hear her whispered reply.  
The plunk and hiss intrude.  
Her throat rattles, lungs wheeze and weep.  
Plunk.  
And she forever stops trying.  
Hiss.  
To say what she has already said and forgotten.  
And doesn't need to say because already we know.  
Plunk and hiss  
Something of her is gurgling beneath the rattle.  
She fights for air

And drowns in every breath.

Plunk and hiss.

She exhales.

We count on our fingers like children to five.

No breath.

To ten. Still no inhale.

Plunk and hiss.

Her head slumps, loosely hinged to her neck.

One of us repositions her. I don't know who.

Not me.

She gasps. We startle, and count, and wait.

Plunk and hiss. Plunk and hiss,

She gasps again. We count and wait.

Hold our breath.

Plunk and hiss, plunk and hiss,

Plunk.

Her eyes and mouth freeze. Open.

To let her soul escape.

Hiss.

One of us unplugs the machine, I don't know who.

Not me.

In silence we breathe in the dark air.

Until we break. Even me.

**What I took**

I took her amber wedding pic  
I didn't take her mink,  
I took the dollies that don't match  
A rosary I don't pray.

I didn't want her worn-out mink  
I'm keeping her diamond ring  
I took the rosary I don't pray  
Her leather gloves too small.

I'm keeping her diamond ring, I say.  
Two dishes, roses red.  
I grabbed her leather gloves too small.  
Her quilt is packed away.

I took two tiny dishes, painted roses red.  
A flowered plate with gilded gold  
A rosary I don't pray.  
I love the amber wedding pic.

### The Cricket's Song

I listen to the cricket's trill. Thinking  
there is nothing else, until the breeze  
joins them in concert, skittering  
leaves and clattering my wind  
chime.

I attend to the contour  
of the Mango tree, against  
the clouded sky. The wind rustles  
the leaves and washes my face. In  
rhythmic cold embrace.

The dog sneezes, then yaps  
at some distant howl. A chorus  
of barking commences. Echoes.  
Crescendos, then halts  
for the Crickets' refrain.

What I would have done tonight  
is call you. But you have ceased  
to be. I listen instead to the  
love songs of the crickets.  
Cadence.