

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 return with you, daughter, to dust.

The 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.
But I was 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 last much longer. 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

raspberry jam, but you say there's no red
only black. I look at my belly and try to 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 May this morning.
The green swords protect the roots, but 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 go to the library and leaf through picture
books, ones I had as a child. A young dad
guides the scissors as his daughter cuts a heart

from construction paper. *It's an I Love You Heart*,
she beams to her father, forgetting the rule about quiet.
He puts his finger to his lips, and I see you as a dad.
When I go to the bathroom, I find a bright red
has filled the bowl. At the doctor's they scan another picture,
but this one no longer shows the pulse of the first morning.

The blood comes heavy in the night, and in morning
you're still awake by my side. I lay my head on your heart,
am soothed by its beat. I think of the small paper picture
and the glowing shape that was its center. I stay quiet,
hold your hand and wait.. I watch the red
blossom on the sheet and hope 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.

Water

Carrying your son across the street
I stopped short—he had kissed my cheek

And murmured “Soft, like water,”
as the hearse honked by. I caught you

there behind his eyes and missed,
already, bok choy at the beach. I wished

like a child, you hadn’t jumped,
and saw you suspended, not lumped

on the sand beneath the monstrous bridge
after a three-day search. From the edge

did you know that below
the waves would turn to stone?

The Tiny Tin Trash Can

Stands smug in its minimalism, in its
Solid unbeatable age—grace in aluminum
At the corner of the quietest house on the old
Graveled road. A week's worth of trash easily
Fitting inside so that no bag is visible—this
Is a diaper-pail sized receptacle and there it gloats.
Around for years before all our awareness
Of recycling and compost created more bins
for us to sort our vices in.

And across the street from the raised eyebrow
Of this slight silver lady's upturned handle, I am
Blue plastic rectangles. Two large
Rubber Hefty tubs with lids and the sprawl of plastic
And rubber and glass---all chronicling the last two weeks—
Capri Sun cardboard and individually packaged
Snack boxes times five kids
And therefore beer and wine bottles galore,
Barely decent in the beating sun.

And that gray beauty deserves to feel superior—
She, like her owner, knows decent use of resources,
Respect for conservation and small grace. Clara
Was the only person beside my husband to notice
That our 9 month-old daughter's eyes were almost black
And so reflective that you couldn't look at her,
Couldn't look there without seeing yourself.