

Women of Cards

Jocelyn Kearnl

In a monthly cycle,
women gather to play cards,
to not talk of the children
they have or don't.

Red is the color of life,
they say, and black
trumps it
for its purposes.

I shuffle the well-worn cards,
deal to each at the table
her own hand,
each randomly.

Ellen, the divorcee, rages
against the death of her 10-year-old son.
He died in her ex's trailer,
temporary gas tanks leaked,

intruded while the son showered,
suffocated his pink lungs.
Because of this, she risks
the least in protecting her three remaining.

Shelley, mother to none,
whose uterus has never thickened
with rich minerals, reaches 40
and failed blessings,

wonders why she cannot be a woman
until her house
is full. She discards in turn
the queen of spades.

Rachel, abused by her father, discovers
adulthood at age 31, the blood
of her victimizer forever
flowing in her children.

And I, in youth,
hold my flushed hand of hearts;
impatient for my turn
to play.