

Guest Room

Our children were conceived
in a carved maple bed sent
from Milwaukee on the train
by my husband's grandmother in 1937.

Last night, celebrating thirty-five years,
we turned back its eyelet sheets,
the floor seeming to lower beneath us,
the bodies of all the women

my husband *could* have married
crowding around the foot
of our bed, handing us their weary
hearts, struggling to remember

him. I offered them my hands, fingernails
with sunken moons. Our shadows blended
on the wall. Through the open window
I saw glaciers, snow folded

in their laps, and wondered if they were
breathing. This was the same
carved maple bed where, so many years ago,
the stork left our children in the dark of night.

The Holding Room

In a plowed field at the rim
of the southern Utah desert
one of those Schnebbley brothers

found connected bones,
the skull of a young girl,
and a set of terrible blue toenails.

Hearing about it, I have nightmares
in which I stumble across a rib-cage
still wearing a backless hospital gown.

The Schnebbley boy's find
was a partial skeleton like the one
hanging in my father's office closet,

by which he learned anatomy.
A kidney floats in a bottle on my dad's desk.
A jar of liquid cocaine lies in his little black bag,

for setting nose fractures. My father leaves
the lights on, the door ajar, so his patients
cannot trap him in their comedies.

Bliss

I trace my past life through hairdos: ringlets,
pigtails, finger waves, straightened-on-juice-cans,
bouffant, French braids, and—worst—sausage rolls
flying back from my face like ditsy, exuberant wings.

At fifty-eight, I lie gingerly on a satin pillowcase—
must not muss my baked-under-the-dryer curls—
dreading the day I start swaddling my head in a lacy
Mother Hubbard cap, like my mother always wore to bed.

Across asparagus and Metamucil, my husband pores
over my crow's feet and droopy lids, pondering, "Who is
that old woman?" He blurts, "Should I wear a hat?
An orange feather stuck in the band of a brown fedora?"

One partner's memory slips away like quicksilver. For
another month or so, we're still one flesh, our bedsheets
worn smooth through a long, tempestuous marriage. After
that, one of us lies awake, trying to memorize the stages of grief.