

## “Mother Love”

My mother hoards baby dresses.  
She never speaks of them, but I know  
starched frocks collect in a bottom drawer,  
bought from consignment shops on her way  
to some other errand, their smocked yokes  
embroidered with tiny roses too gorgeous  
to pass up. I know she pities me,  
each year growing more accomplished  
as my eggs wait in their dark carton,  
marked with dates for release  
and expiration. Pregnant friends  
who once devoted their bodies to sex  
and professional suits are vigilant:  
no tap water, no bottom-feeding fish,  
no coffee, not one drop of wine.  
Ancient Hebrew texts used the same word  
to name Adam's toil and Eve's labor  
pains: humanity's curse is work  
toward no certain end, the anguish of love  
and not knowing. Mom bites her tongue,  
politely inquires after my job, then  
complains that people still ask her why  
I remain childless. I know she can't explain  
how her only daughter could be so smart  
and not see that even I would not exist  
if she and my father had waited until  
they could afford if or knew for sure  
that their marriage would hold. Time  
passes, she grows heavy and soft with all  
we can't say, longing to give her love  
to a girl guileless and simple enough  
to take it without question or doubt.