

DEIRDRE DWYER

For an Only Child

Your mother died when you were ten.
Of whispers, I thought,
 of mumbled words.
You said "cancer"
hoping I would not hear
 "of the breast."

I think of you, mother—eight, nine, and ten—
in the backyard by yourself talking to dolls
and roses. You saw her only on her good days

And later you didn't see her at all.

Your father remarried,
sent you off to boarding school:
I think of the torments,
the tips of your thin braids
dipped into pots of ink
and your mother's name
murmuring, sucked and pulled
into a flower.

Accustomed to loneliness, did you
send yourself away from her, a kind of revenge?
Were you surprised then, as I was,
when she broke your exile: a whisper released,
when her photograph somehow
appeared, when quietly you found her
a place on the wall where you framed
her soft presence in gold?