

## The Floating Rib

Because a woman had eaten something  
when a man told her not to. Because the man  
who told her not to had made her  
from another man's bone. That's why  
men badgered the heart side of her chest,  
knowing she could not give the bone back, knowing  
she would always owe them that one bone.

And you could see how older girls who knew  
their catechism armed themselves against it:  
with the pike end of teasing combs  
scabbarded in pocketbooks that clashed  
against the regulation jumper's night-watch plaid.  
In the girls' bathroom mirror, you watched them  
hazard the spike at the edge of their eyes,

shepherding bangs through which they peered  
like cheetahs in an upside-downward growing grass.  
Then they'd mouth the words to "Runaway"  
and run white lipstick around their lips—  
white to announce they had no blood  
so any wound would leave no trace, as Eve's  
having nothing more to lose must have made her

fearless. What was weird was how soon  
the ordinary days started running past them  
like a river, and how willingly they entered it  
and how they rose up on the other side. Tamed,  
or—God, no—your *mother*: ready to settle  
with whoever found the bone under her blouse  
and give it over, and make a life out of getting it back.