

## Mourning Routine

*For Lidia*

I get the call in the morning  
that my sister has passed  
to a safer place, but not one  
of more love than here.

They always seem to die  
just after they dramatically  
improve. I went to sleep  
last night with a hopeful smile.

I try not to think of her  
in the coffin as I drive  
six hundred miles to see  
what is left of her.

In the parking lot, Death  
grabs me by the shoulders, drags  
me inside, laughing. I shake  
it off and pray in my heart.

I talk, cry with family,  
hug. So many *I am sorry's*  
whispered. Her son takes me  
by the arm, each step closer

to her is a growing anguish.  
I wish I could have seen her  
one more time before she left  
just to tell her that I love

the way she smiled and  
pushed me when I was three  
in a stroller through a park  
filled with the sweet breath

of eucalyptus trees in Montevideo  
the city of roses where I was born.  
A bouquet of red and white roses  
hangs over her mahogany casket

where she sleeps with a rosary  
wrapped in her hands. I touch  
her embalmed fingers, plastic  
beads, add my prayers to hers.

A psalm on my lips, I kneel  
at the altar where her body is left  
as sacrifice to disease. I speak softly  
as if she can hear me, a routine

I've endured for my mother  
and many friends that I have seen  
like this. Sometimes, heaviness lifts  
for a little while, but for now,

my eyes are flushed with Grief—  
that vulture feeding on my dying.  
I await renewal in the morning  
when Joy might land as a dove  
light as feathers.