

Mirror, Mirror

Felled by the anesthetic,
she gave up her womb

not because it no longer had a use
but because it had outlived its usefulness.

An orderly rolled her deflated part
to the Gross Room, with others' losses:

two five-gallon buckets of breast tissue
and three necrotic toes.

She found this intimacy with strangers
monstrous, and laughed until

she had to start her course
of synthetic opioids:

for the obstacles, painkillers.
She has never misspoken of it since.

Visiting, I, her youngest son, remind her
of the iron law of unintended consequences,

just as her aunts, parents, dearest friend
and younger sister remind her how

good lives end: like empty ones.
She had a beloved cat, a stray,

painted in oils by a pet portraitist,
from a photograph. The painting, maudlin,

is propped on the well stocked liquor cabinet,
the top of its gilt frame touching the gilt

frame of a mirror hung at an angle,
to make the cramped, octagonal

dining room look larger, better lit
and nothing like an operating theatre

or a sepulcher. A hummingbird feeder
suspended from the lilac bush outside

the leaded windows is the only red
reflected in that doubtful mirror —

but why should I say boo
about the décor? She haunts

me as I haunt her. We breathe
on the mirror together.