Home From Kildorrery

She smells of cold baths,
wood stoves, sheep, potatoes,
pipe tobacco
from Dennis’s hand-carved bowl,

a certain small that comes from tilled sod
when the world is cut and folded
revealing a tangle of roots,
some thick as wrists.

Her cheek on mine is a cool,
damp pillow;
her eyes blur as if staring
too long into the candle.

The small of her back
sinks into my hand
as if she is made of the feathers
from the bed in which she left her warmth.

A squeeze before she turns and shuffles
toward the luggage carousel,
fist to snare her suitcase,
then to claim a spindle chair
crated with rough pine,
tied with too many revolutions of twine,
and knotted with knots
only a razor could solve.

Hidden, her father’s Jameson
stains the flowered seat;
a dark shoreline rims
an island of tobacco juice.

Hidden, his Cross bleeds
while his hands like a giant’s feet
pace the desktop in search of the pen
she sent to “write how Mommy’s doing,”

and the tea spill
from the time she balanced the saucer on air
as she backed out of the room,
knocking his wool overcoat off the peg.

“I’m ready,” she calls,
a small voice that rises and sings
as it approaches the end of a thought,
that straightens pleats and collars.

It is Nellie’s brogue,
the voice her mother’s sister
uses on the cows
to bring long tugs of milk,

the voice from across a wooden table
with its linen
and the steam rising
off a plate of lamb.

I take the suitcase; though I tell her
we should switch, she braces and lifts,
exchanging that chair
for the part of her in Kildorrery.