

Cornelia Hoogland

Especially *Oh*, especially *darling*

The girl is in bed with her mother.
Their flannelette nighties leap round their waists
and they make laughing sounds
that like leftover coloured heat in a glass kiln
there are no words for. *Glee*, maybe, or *joy*.
The bed's blue comforter is fat as a cloud.

Stay with the image of cloth fluttering. A cloud
shifting past the sun travelling the length of the ravine
the mother knows lurks outside
like the separation just ahead.
The mother leaving, the daughter staying.
Mountains, prairie, the Great Lakes separating them,
the years of bawling into the black *O* of the telephone.

Nestled here on Miller Avenue
in the last days as well as the
first egg-bursts into the fallopian current
deep in the girl's body,
the mother—before she can haul them back—says
Oh darling girl. Three good words,
the one thing a mother can promise her daughter,
to hold her precious. And then she says,
if you love this you're going to love sex.

What has the daughter done with those words?
Ask her. But the mother—
through the years of bad sex and no sex—clings
to that romp and her self-mothering
especially *Oh*, especially *darling*.