

LAURIE KRUK

Heart Exercise

Mothers-in-process, we meet at intersections
of public and private. In the hallway
to the birthing unit, bent double, waiting
for the tidal wave
that will throw the newest Crusoe
ashore, we grimace in recognition
of nurse-led neighbour: *Yes, you too...*
Three years later, lined up
for the After Hours Clinic, no supper, holding
crying toddlers to the breasts which no longer answer,
while childless ones behind check watches, shift loudly, we lock eyes: *Yes*.
Or in the spring parking lot, six years on
where we must talk a daughter out of a dirty shirt before Grandma's:
pre-breasts wiggling, voice shrilling nine-year-old shame,
we avoid looking too closely as we pass
by, but smile our knowing.

Though years roll on,
you know that there is no end
to this working of the core;
even as we complete
one mothering task, hurry them along
to the next station
a late-learning muscle

is growing inside of me, taking
 up more space, so that I ache
 to expand—

Exasperated, one spring day, you send both,
 girls seven and ten, for a walk to the corner,
 and blessedly, they go.
 Ten minutes, twenty, forty—you start to look
 out the window, out
 the door. Down the street. You
 get in the car, heart hammering: *Yes, you too*
 start down the driveway, around
 the corner
 and their absence widens, takes shape as shadows
 thicken obscenely at road edges. You want
 to shout
 to bovinely oblivious neighbours
 watering lawns, sitting on their porches,
 disturb the peace—*You, too*—

but just before you draw
 the first bitter lungful up,
 to wound the air with their names,
 they come running down the road

ditch flowers
 in their hands.