

She threw herself upon the coffin

as it moved down the nave
on silent, wheeled hydraulics
so that the pallbearers—tall boys
like him—did not bear but steered it
like an awkward boat without a prow,
like nothing but a coffin, really,
raised on a cart to glide eye level
past the pews, and when it passed,
she threw herself upon it—
first her hands, then lowering
her forearms down against
the varnished metal finish, she pushed
until her torso lay along the curving
lid, across the place where his
might be, then lay her head
above his head that years before
was lidded by her skin—
boy head she carried, covered,
washed, and woke, and rubbed
and combed and chased
to bed and warned and kissed,
as she does now the spot she's thrown
herself upon, upon the coffin
of the one the papers labeled *man*,
as in *a man was shot and killed Tuesday*,
though he was only weeks past 21,
not son, not name, not love, but *man*,
as though the bullet made him whole
and finished him, but not for her,
who lay now on the coffin unfinished
and undone, as if she could undo
the night, the car, the friend
who wouldn't speak, the shots
the neighbors thought were fireworks,
the evidence markers visible on the street—
all of it she threw herself upon, and also
on the coffin holding the body of her son,
as we all watched, and could not
move or speak, as if the air we would
have used to do those things was gone.

—for *Elizabeth Cardoso*