

Dirty Laundry

Tom from next door rings the bell
asks if I still need the clothesline--
the frayed rope hanging
from a rusty hook and wheel
outside my back door
is attached to a tree
in the corner of his yard.

When this was her house
my mother
hung towels and bedsheets
bleach choking rhododendrons.
She rarely hung clothes
and never undergarments,
no one else needed to know
when we lost fist-fights at school
or that we began menstruating.

These secrets
she kept
like so many others:
her money stolen
by the youngest nephew,
the pain from an intestinal mass
that (suddenly) killed her,
my father's *other* son
who appeared in the hall closet
cashed child support checks
in a rusty tin box.

Tom cuts down the line
it lies in the grass
a dead snake.