

A Narrow Field

Open, the coffin shocked me.
I had thought that we were more disposed
to keep things hidden.
Thought – *I did not tick this box?*
In any case, you looked well

wearing the clothes I'd chosen –
light, comfortable linen, a touch of colour.
As per the regulations
there was no one there.
Still, the choice had vexed me.

You wore your hair as a small cloud
with the promise of showers
and I patted it as a child might
size up a stick of floss.
I saw you as a great painting

recovered from a cave or cellar
with me the expert
able to recognise the original.
Bohr said that an expert
is a man who has made

all the mistakes
in a narrow field.
And probably I have made

mistakes on you.
Inside the coffin, a sable curtain

and two pink buds,
my infant fists,
tangled inside it. Tangled
in that way babies have
of grabbing, and I mean really

yanking, their mother's hair.
The trick being
to stay calm,
even as a tear pricks.
So the baby knows it is not a game

which would only lead to more yanking.
The trick being to stay calm
as you unsnarl yourself
hair by hair
from their grasp.