

How is it possible to ever say goodbye?

Having never had her and watched her always never  
Having herself, when she died, I wanted to keep her for ever.  
To confound the burial men I filled her coffin with stones  
And a dead sheep to keep the stones still.

Then I scrubbed her all over with bleach.  
Remembering my biology I eviscerated her.  
I fed the guts and organs to the pigs and hens.  
Through her nostrils I pulled her brains with a bent skewer  
She'd used each Christmas on the turkey rump.  
The brain was spongy and grey and I looked at it,  
Wondering if I was in there somewhere. Just in case  
I preserved it in a marmalade jar I found in the cellar.  
I rolled her up, having first extracted the bones  
Taking instruction from a cookery book. 'How to Bone'.  
(The bones presented a grave problem: in the end I burnt them  
Over and over, crushing them once they were brittle.  
O they were a gift for the old apple trees whose fruit had  
Filled her pies for all the years of my childhood. I  
Raked the grey grit between them.) My mother now  
Fitted neatly into a suitcase and we went on a journey.

North, the winds are dry and cold. I rented a lonely house by the sea  
And hung my empty mother on the washing line, two pegs  
For each shoulder as she'd taught me. Her breasts hung down.  
Try as I might, I could not remember drinking from them.  
All night I watched her hanging in the salty air like a frozen sheet.

Boneless feet pointing downwards, her yellowed toes just  
Tipping the ground. She was a dead dancer.  
Daytimes, I unpegged her and kept her rolled up, out of sight.  
Nights drying and days rolled up, my mother became soft, like kidskin.  
After one month, I packed her back into my travelling case.  
Between, some mementos of my stay, local whisky, honey and shortbread.  
We went home, my soft new mother and I. To the south again.  
She lies now, behind the spare blankets in the mahogany linen press  
Which once witnessed my conception, my birth.