“Mother Love”

My mother hoards baby dresses. She never speaks of them, but I know starched frocks collect in a bottom drawer, bought from consignment shops on her way to some other errand, their smocked yokes embroidered with tiny roses too gorgeous to pass up. I know she pities me, each year growing more accomplished as my eggs wait in their dark carton, marked with dates for release and expiration. Pregnant friends who once devoted their bodies to sex and professional suits are vigilant: no tap water, no bottom-feeding fish, no coffee, not one drop of wine. Ancient Hebrew texts used the same word to name Adam's toil and Eve's labor pains: humanity's curse is work toward no certain end, the anguish of love and not knowing. Mom bites her tongue, politely inquires after my job, then complains that people still ask her why I remain childless. I know she can't explain how her only daughter could be so smart and not see that even I would not exist if she and my father had waited until they could afford if or knew for sure that their marriage would hold. Time passes, she grows heavy and soft with all we can't say, longing to give her love to a girl guileless and simple enough to take it without question or doubt.