

Dark Matter

My daughter broke my back in labor
is the kind of thing women say to you
over pink-frosted birthday cake, above the din of four year olds
after you have children

and so, while we eat the pizza crusts off our children's plates
the mothers commiserate about the shared failings
of our postpartum bodies – how, in the weeks after birth,
hair fell out in clumps that clogged the shower,
how even the same pounds

sit differently around labor-shifted hips. When I was young,
I had no idea how many things there were
to be bad at: prompt return of paperwork,
patience with automated phone menus,

regular bang trims and dental exams. And also
the things that actually matter: breastfeeding, for example,
my nipples three days after giving birth so cracked and bleeding
that even the lactation specialist and her nurse

took a startled step back when I unhooked my bra. It is so hard
to live inside a body. But as I watch the woman whose daughter broke her back
wipe frosting from the cheeks of the son she gave birth to afterward
my heart is caught by our collective unbearable luck. And then,

as if the simple act of wishing another year of happiness,
of eating cake and leaping through the bounce house
is too much joy to bear,
the children close their eyes and sing.

