

Six Blankets

Under my bed smells of dust, of winter blankets.
The mattress bulges through the slats
above my head. Linda Ford's dad is downstairs
telling Mum and Dad about us
stealing sweets from RS McColl's and cake decorations
from the baker's. Any minute now

Dad will thunder up the stairs two at a time
fly into my room and shout for me to come out
yank off his belt pull me over his lap blanket me
in blows for being bad, nothing like the girl I wear
for church when my hair is straight and shiny
to my shoulders. It was Mrs Galbraith

caught us stealing, I don't know why
she went to Linda's house instead of mine. Once
we dragged a dead cat home after school,
it was lying on the kerb like a folded blanket.
We thought we could bring it back to life
if we put it somewhere warm, there was

something poking out of its bottom that looked
like an egg – we wanted to hatch it,
keep the kitten. An old lady saw us pulling it, tutted,
said it was disgusting, but she didn't understand
about the egg. We made a bed for it
in Linda's garage with straw and blankets

but the egg didn't hatch even though Linda
sneaked out at night to change the food and water.
Eventually the cat went stiff like Grandma's blanket beater
and then that lady was right, it really was disgusting.
The thrashing will sting, leave red marks
across the back of my thighs. I'll stuff

a corner of my blanket into my mouth.
I'm bad, much worse than Tracey who never gets shouted at
or thrashed, only once got sent upstairs to her room
when at dinner she shook the HP sauce
and the lid flew off like a bomb exploding
and brown sauce went all over the kitchen.