

BEFORE THE FORMAL FEELING COMES

She was inside her head speaking in tongues.
Tourette's of the heart, cataract sentiment,
some saccharine crap, how he'd smiled
when he died, what was really a death mask

tic, seize and grimace. Cataract sentiment
about him being *God's brand new bat boy*
when he died, what was really a death mask
she'd read as a smile while she felt

something like—Joy. *God's new bat boy*
coaching first base for the Angels
and every dark dirge sang a promise
that nothing could steal her boy ever again.

Coaching first base for the Angels, he
would be safe, even with only one leg,
her boy, her boy, her boy, her boy
like a door kicked in, askew on one hinge.

He would be safe, even with his leg gone
to the cancer. Even with him all askew
like a door badly hung. The ways of God
are mysterious to man—but to mothers,

most cruel. The cancer skewered his heart.
Then she was undone. Unbuttoned.
Unbooted. Ungloved. Unknown to man,
a door unhinged and kicked in.

It was before the formal feeling comes;
she was inside her head speaking in tongues.

Rebecca Foust

[Please note that the phrase "before the formal feeling comes" is from Emily Dickinson's #372, "After great pain, a formal feeling comes-]