

My Mother Played in a Mortuary

by Julie Cyr

Her best friend, Becky, lived across the street
at Thibeau's Funeral Home.

They played in the embalming room
where Mr. Thibeau drained the jugular:
 blood,

 bile,

 burdens...

flowed into a holding tank beneath the floor,
the DNA of all the French Canadians fusing together.

Into the carotid artery—

 formaldehyde,

finding the empty veins, capillaries, and last thoughts,
making the skin less organ, more rubber.

My mother and Becky pretended
they were nurses, could heal the bodies,
bring them back to life. Wishing
the corpses would sing Frere Jacques,
or hand them sucre a la creme.

A guy named Jim runs the business now,
embalmed all four of my grandparents,
combed the few hairs left on Grampy's head
 and knotted his tie,
put too much blush on my grandmother
 (she would call it rouge).