Room in the Bag of Stars

—Golden Shovel sestina on a line by Ursula K. Le Guin

We’re all under ten and run from room to room
and up the front stairs, down the back, in
the pantry and out, taking measure of the
whole house. It’s ours now, a cornucopia, a bag
we open and close, stop frame, gamut of
possibility. Outside, day tears down and stars
curtsy into the sky. We’d sleep but we can’t, stars
spinning past, ghosts already moving room
to room. We’re eight and six and four and full of
what’s new, can’t see the blow torch on ice in
winter, sponges of tepid water, the stiff bag
of clothespins, the empty bottles and the
man, our father, passed out downstairs in the
bathroom, a sign on the door, little gold stars
to make it acceptable, under the stairs a bag
of nails and in the attic rusted hinges. He’s in a room
we all made new, a plum-colored warm place in
the corner of the house where he could sleep off
the desperation. We are under ten. What do we know of
time’s persistence? Of shame and the
slow erosion of trust? We three are in
footed pjs, yours with trucks, yours bears, mine stars
plummeting in tinsel, and we sleep in one room,
der under furniture draped with sheets. Our sleeping bags
toe to head, we’re whispering as if we are in a paper bag
folded neatly into comfort, whispering of
anything, as you do when you’re under ten and in a room
far from anywhere and can’t yet see the ladder, the
chainsaw, the night he drove away under stars
to the river and we all drove, too, in

and out of tree-lined drives, past gates, to stop in
at places he’d been before, carrying in a bag
his coat because he’d left not ready, drunken stars
spinning in his head, we had no idea of how lost it was possible to be, how the whole sky could come down into the room of your mind, line it in rotten stars.
We are under ten, safe in a room, tucked in our bags of down, draped sheets making all the night a home.