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Learning from Mother



BY HOLLY HUNT

I will tell you that my mother was smart,
a wire-cutting wit that could snap everything
midair and bring pause to all voices there.
And in that pause would form a certain space
in every thought, when she would say something
so accurate that all ears would leap,
heads tilted to the Common Philosophy Lady:
listen. . . did we hear the delicate click
of the Wheel? Hush. It was truth and heaven
in her words and the exact colors of all birds
that made everyone barely smile
even though life is not really funny.
And sometimes she was a cat holding truth
by the tail so softly in her mouth
and then she kept a silent distance
the way some people do after they softly lie.
And this is not disgusting, so the cat rides.

There was always near the middle of my mother's
sight some little explosion in the air.
So fast it flashed that she could never really swear
that it was there, but this was followed
with some catchy solid notion
that could hang for years like a dangling
holiday ornament, maybe one made of sequins
and straight pin eyes,
looking like it escaped from the state asylum.

I will say my mother made me smart
for that is what she'd tell me to tell you.
For every moment she batted away my hand
from the electric sockets! Teaching me
things on a long term scale.
How immediate came the longtime lesson,
advanced with her hovering promise of truth.
She might command me to Jump! Learn by chance
because there are steps, whole flights of them,
that are often leaped.
She could also lay a featherweight measuring stick
across the top of my head so I could feel balance.

Teaching was her profession. The complete statement.
The icicle facts of sharp quick-melt Comedy,
or Tragedy never crumbling but slicing

like the guillotine dropping down through her class
as she stood in her classroom
made serious by Juliet or Hamlet:
you knew that prince had arrived
by the utter following lack of sound.

From only my heart I recall her earliest lessons to me:
words of love spoken to brilliant living things
that a higher spirit made: the azaleas, the trees,
the wind, the snow, the falling leaves.
And I would have a cymbal of leaves
and we would dance many unplanned steps,
and then a hop or two would come at the break
of thought. My mother was Helenic
in her father a herdsman
and in my father a fisherman's day.

And now. She is the sharp timeless needle
filed by way of a hardwon beauty.
She can step down and mend me
and rise into heaven again.

The sight of her is clearer and closer to me
even than was the practical work of her mind.
Her logical voice grew closer, then farther,
then closer again, and way out again
swinging on her own trapeze, her trick.
When she died, I saw her let it go.
What she knew about giving up life
was that it is hard sometimes, that's all,
with not one friend from earth or heaven
to be with you and then you fall into the dark
where other lessons are learned.

Some of us will live knowing nothing,
no helpful recollections of a Heaven
will ever stretch between, but if one
will believe, as she would insist,
always believe, such a cord of remembering
might stretch to you
once or twice in your life.

And even though she knew enough
to teach me this by talking to the grass,
some things happened to her that were unfair,
like dying too early in the middle of a happy life.
When healthy death came, she only gave him one helping.
He was not allowed dessert, yet he was not full, either.
He was only an authority figure in grey and black.
Give him his minute of respect, and then leave.
Oh do not treat him without a measure of sympathy.
Because there are angels that can blow him away
by holding to their mouths wooden duck callers
or by howling into the mountainside,
and they help us out often enough.■