

Sisters, Mothers, Daughters

If I could give advice about daughters without having one,
I would encourage mothers and fathers to always tell your daughter she is beautiful
it seems so obvious I know, but please listen
tell her she is beautiful when she is 6 years old
and she discovers something she loves for the first time and her face lights up in delight
tell her it is beautiful that she can see the magic in her own mind
because soon she will be surrounded by people that tell her magic isn't real, her smile collapsing in disappointment
tell her she is beautiful when she is 11
and her body is shifting in ways she doesn't understand
it bends at the hand of Mother Nature while her heart still belongs to stuffed animals, Barbie dolls
fathers, please tell your daughter she is beautiful and smart, and you love her with all your heart
tell her her head is filled with seeds that will blossom and bloom into a garden you will water
and never let wilt as long as you live
it will not change the fact that boys and grown men alike will start to stare at her
their mouths silent but their eyes saying everything from your nightmares
but it will help her to not be consumed by them
tell your daughter she is beautiful when she is 15
and every meal comes back up
when she wakes up at 4 in the morning, sits at the dark kitchen table
prepares her food in secret and savors each bite in her mouth
the flavors of the forbidden engulfing her taste buds the way sleep engulfs her family just upstairs
can't they hear her?
She has found a way to cheat the evil game every girl is forced to play
she will take in the aromas and become delirious at the sickening sweetness
it won't become a part of her, because it comes up acidic instead
she tells herself she has found it, every woman's wildest fantasy
to eat their heart's desire without a pound, ounce or inch added
she is in control, she says, she always was the smart one
it was scary at first, because throwing up is so scary when you are little
but everything is scary at first until it becomes part of your routine
eat your breakfast, stick your finger down your throat, brush your teeth, go to school
by 6 am when the world is just awakening
the sunlight is just starting to eliminate the shadows that she hides in
when dreams are just starting to fade and the day breaks
her little body has already been to hell and back
tell her she is beautiful, but don't stop there
because she will see it as desperate confirmation that it's working, and she shouldn't stop
tell her she is beautiful despite all the pain she feels
and despite the awful things she puts her body through
tell her she was beautiful before, now, and will be forever after
God, she needs to hear that
this is not a woman on a fad diet, but a little girl destroying herself
she is your child, she needs you to hold her so tight it hurts as much as her soul does
tell her you will fight with every aching bone in your body to save her from this
she needed that from you, from me
sixteen months my elder, the oldest child who now travels the world
but not to the lands we seek for comfort, relaxation, but the ones we see on the news
we learn there is pain there, the type of suffering and loss we'd give our lives to shield our children from
but no one actually goes there, no one protects the children who live there
just the ones who sit on the couch and watch it from afar
"If that ever happened here I don't know what I'd do."
We don't put ourselves in their shoes to feel empathy
we put ourselves in their shoes only to spit out the slimy selfish thought,
"What if that was me?"
You, you care about them
you took the demons that still invade your heart and made them the fuel for your compassion
you created a life for yourself that those girls you compared yourself to don't have half the depth to comprehend
my Sagittarius sister, you are fire
your flames dance and illuminate every time you talk about something you are passionate about
it's like God forgot to give some people empathy but made up for it when he made you

I only wish you had a little more of it for yourself
I want to tell you broken souls are the most beautiful
that when you used to purge and it felt like a piece of you came up with your food, and your heart shattered a little,
someone saved all of those broken pieces and sewed them tightly back together
with thread made from the heartstrings of a warrior
other women long for fulfillment and try to find it in man,
you long for fulfillment and turn over every pebble rock and boulder
dive deep into oceans, climb trees you can't see the tops of
travel thousands of miles to foreign lands to find it
I desperately want you to know that your story is not shameful, and should not be a secret
because don't all stories of queens have heartbreak, monsters, adventure?
You broke your own heart, slit the throat of the dragon, and booked a flight like it was your horse riding into sunset
on that drunken night in North Carolina when you confessed all your misery to me
and brought your demons out of their caves for me to meet you cried, "Nobody saw me. Nobody saw me."
I want you to know that I see you now
I see you for your haunted lonely past
for the compassion you show others today despite still being at war with yourself
for the peace I hope you find in the future, I see you
you fill your mind with the biographies of women you admire
but you don't need to read a book for that, just write one
your story is not shameful, it is my inspiration my beautiful sister
I know you are still figuring this out but you have come so far, give yourself some credit
say it in the mirror, scream it
I am not a mother, but on this very day I vow to celebrate the beauty of my unborn daughter
to celebrate myself so I can become a woman worthy of being her mother
to honor my mother, my grandmother
to tell my sister I wish I could cloak myself in her strength like armor and plunge into the world head on
spearing away at my insecurities and shoving a million daggers into the fucking stereotype
that women can only be smart or pretty
to my daughter; who lives somewhere in the sky right now
when I bring you down from there, into me, and then out into a world that is scary and cold
I vow on my life to celebrate your mind, body, and soul for the master-pieces they are
you come from a lineage of warriors
and if anyone ever utters the foolish, despicable idea that you can't be both intelligent and pretty at once
make them swallow their words and choke on them, let it die with them
you are so beautiful.

