

Weaving

With cramped hands and cranky wrists
I rush to finish the baby's blanket

I don't know why I feel she
needs to receive it- precisely
on the day of her birth.

I can give it to her
a few weeks later and surely
she will never remember.
But I will.

So I strain to continue,
lifting and dipping the metal hook
between tiny windows of tightened yarn,
until soon I note my own shed hair
beginning to mingle in the pattern.

With a faint fervor
I try to remove these
pieces of my dying body.
I pluck and pull against
tangled joints of knotted fuzz.

But it only ends
in unkempt shredding
the dead thread of my long lock,
leaving a gnarled knot
I then endeavor to bury
so I learn to relent
and leave it there.

Then once I see
a silky strand
straying gently into the pattern
I foster its flow;
folding it through loops and holes:

a woven wave of auntie,

a piece of my dying body,
in case I never get to meet her,
at least my hair can hug her softly.

The Ceiling

I remember many nights
staring at the ceiling
I thought that's where
you were supposed to look
when you want to talk to God;
either that or you close your eyes,
but I was seven and
closed eyes were scary
so I locked open lids
with the faded glow-in-the-dark-star ceiling

I remember playing
with my hands
worrying that maybe I hadn't
folded my fingers correctly

I was a quiet kid
-more by accident
than personality
but when I was seven
I talked a lot to God

I remember the phone call;
maybe that's when my
phone phobia was born.
It was an hour or so
since mama returned home
from her baseline mammogram
randomly recommended at 36 years old

I remember her heaving
and gasping for breath
then my sisters and I - coaxed
into the living room where the
closed door was wide open to
frightened ears
we could hear her panting and puking up air
dad had to haul her to the hospital
- tranquilizers to calm her down
while scared sisters froze to the sofa,
in silent fear.

I remember people crying and
coming to clean our house

doing laundry and dropping off
aluminum pans full of food
we'd never normally eat,
except for maybe baked mac and cheese.

I remember late at night staring at the ceiling
telling God how much I loved my Auntie Madeleine
but she cooked grilled cheese with wheat bread
that scratched the roof of my mouth
and the ceiling beneath their guest bed
had a weird pattern I couldn't figure out
and I was prone to belly aches that
only mama knew how to soothe and
I didn't want Him to take her.

I remember mama screaming
and crying violent tears
when Meredith shaved her legs
with mama's razor in the shower...
my parents are both nurses
we all knew it wasn't contagious
but when you're terrified you question
every truth you think you know.

I remember going to the hospital
for her 36th treatment of radiation.
her work friend, Patti, who is really
like family, bought me an elephant
in the gift shop while we waited.
I called him Fluffy, 'cause he was fluffy.
I was seven.

I remember a while later,
she asked me if I wanted to see the scars,
the staples looked like
a zipper that bit way too deep,
a hungry metal set of teeth,
and maybe it's weird but I'm glad she showed me.

This year marks twenty-five
since the day life paused in the living room
and I keep thinking of the ceiling
crusty stars and a quiet voice
because I didn't want my folks
to hear me.

In my grown-up years
I talked a lot to God
though for a few it's been radio silence.
yet I still can't forget talking at the ceiling
for all that hasn't happened
the way I think it should've gone
I can't complain
my little voice convinced God
to bring about my mama's healing.

Something Lost

Of course he'd be
her favorite saint-
the Saint of Lost Causes
and Hopeless Cases
and she wasn't even Catholic,
but she seemed to
like the name -- Jude.

it seemed like it
would only fit
someone down-to-earth
and gentle- someone
she could talk to

the one gift she got
from the grandma
who died when she was nine
was a small silver pendant
to her patron saint, the one
thing they shared besides
small stature and the name Pauline
and it made the girl
feel closer to the woman
she had lost

apparently
they both needed hope
and someone to talk to

but then the girl was reckless
she rushed to her remove her jewelry
and she lost the sacred necklace
between the seats of the blue
Jeep Cherokee
but against her anxious tendencies-
she trusted and didn't worry,
she knew it was there-
somewhere

when times were tight
when she was twelve
and the family had to sell the car
she spent what felt like a fractured lifetime
looking for what she still hoped she might find

her tiny fingers poking into the corkscrew
curves and crevices
beneath the leathered bucket seats
but the necklace had joined
the ranks of Lost Causes
and Hopeless Cases
no matter how hard she prayed

and she cried – long and loud
guilt and grief gushing
for the grandma she felt
she was losing- again

she decided that Jude
was probably a jerk
who wasn't a good listener anyway.

Marion

strappy two-inch heels,
leopard print leggings,
and a chained belt
cinched high around her waist.
dark brown locks
clipped tight beneath
a brimmed leather hat,
neighbors watch her walk the
hill in this sketchy,
drug-fueled neighborhood,
in this city
that has always been her home.
she fits, I guess-
better than a nursing home.

at now eighty-eight
years young
she still dyes her own hair
fighting the fumes
as she tremors
with feeble arms
for the fancy of fashion.
she's always been a bit vain
in a hilarious way
shaping her eyebrows
melodramatically
with tongue-tipped
pinky and thumb

she can slick on lipstick
clip an extra feathery hairpiece
and easily pass for eighty-one

she lives by white rice, mashed potatoes,
and ginger ale
with many a mantra and mottos
her favorites land on
“fake it ‘til you make it”
and “make-do”
a child of the Great Depression
and a father who died too young
at fourteen this eldest child
learned to stretch a dollar
hell, her pennies knew pilates

she graduated from the world
that never gave her a piece of paper
to prove what she'd endured

she had swell times, too
at happy health camp for several summers
subsidized by the state
first as a camper and then a counselor
she was meant to entertain
she liked to tap dance, and later tango
late nights at the local tea room
where she'd meet her husband Charlie
the night before he'd leave her
for the second world war
he'd write her letters
she'd write back
and she'd break her engagement to
the chicken farmer
because it never would've worked anyway
"He talked too much!"
"I like quiet men" she'd say
"so I can do all the talking"

and holy hell can she talk-
her anxiety is so severe;
she can't really hear a word you say
though her ears work fine,
she'll mmhmm and ahha
at all the wrong times
though she'll mostly just speak over you
but who can blame her- she's 88.
nearly every person she's ever loved
is six-feet under in a grave
but she's holding out
awhile longer,
she wants to see me
"taken care of"

she taught me to play with paper dolls
and check the oven before I leave the house
carry an umbrella when I'm walking
not for the rain, but to scare the mean-faced, chasing dogs

she taught my sister:
"even though you can open

the pickle jar just fine
pretend you can't sometimes
it makes him feel useful
your trusty protector"

two days after her birthday
last year around this time
she learned to live without
her protector and she's doing just fine

she's surely lonely
and sometimes sad
but she fakes a smile,
calls a cab,
tips a tall-stemmed glass
to the loved ones lost,
and does her best to
just "make-do".