

Early Years

My mother struggled
During the early years
She told me.
She wasn't wasn't married
To my father when I was born.
I remember her holding out
A graying black and white photo
When she decided to tell me.
In the photo I'm propped up
In a baby carriage,
Little baby eyes
Nestled behind mounds
Of doughy baby cheeks.
I hardly recognize myself
glowing with love and trust
—alone, under my knitted hat
As if I'm on my own in that big
City, like I am now,
A blur of tall buildings climbing
To the sky in the background.
Who took this picture of me?
I want to know. She hesitates
Then claims she can't remember,
It was a struggle back then
She only knows.

Driving Lessons

I feared for my life everytime she got behind the wheel.
The first time my mother drove she was 57 I was 22.
That first time out she drove through the cemetery,
And no one died that day but it was only dumb luck.
If she could cook,
 if she could raise children,
 if she could sing,
she could drive she said,
 Let's go, how hard could it be?
She passed the written permit test with a haughty air,
and made her road test appointment nonchalantly.
Riding next to her I was paralyzed
 with doubt and disbelief.
At my expense she'd taught herself to drive.
And she drove like she cooked,
 one degree away from total ruin.
And she drove like she sang, making up the words as she went
and, yes, she also drove like she raised her children,
as if they owed her a debt she expected to be repaid.
When she got her license there was no stopping her.
And when she left my father,
 speeding away in his car,
it was left to me to explain how she got away.

Begrudgingly

She was only in the hospital for 6 days
She'd gotten covid in rehab for a broken leg.
Then she refused to leave,
more days passed
finally she chose hospice care,
and died in painfree confusion.
I held her hand,
little like a child's
and wanting to be held.
But it was my brother who gave her
permission to go.
His words coming softly
as if releasing a frightened bird
back into the wild.
She never opened her eyes again,
as if she could not bear to see
what she was leaving behind.
Away she flew.
This was not the first time
I heard my brother cry.
Sobs bursting from his dry lips.
It turned out he didn't know
what hospice meant and believed
she would recover,
be brand new after going off her meds?
She left me her rock collection
—all resembling shoes.
begrudgingly, I marched
them back in pairs down to the beach
and left them where the tide
could reclaim them.