

## *Chihuahua*

(after *Starfish*, in homage to Eleanor Lerman)

This is what Life does. It gives you an eleven year old  
so innocent that he talks about erections as if they are built from Legos,  
only with blood and tissue. A child who doesn't want to go through "perversity"  
because he doesn't want wet dreams which Alante and Lucas say are gross  
and who says every night, "I never want to leave you, Mom."

Life gives you a mother who revises history as she goes along,  
so the glorious future you grew up with becomes the glorious past  
that never was and there is no place for the misery you remember.  
You were never sick under her roof and all your ills are because you left her.  
The good memories, like lost gems in the dirt are yours alone,  
there is no one to share them with. You are abandoned not once, but  
twice. She erases the chalkboard and starts over, with houses,  
clothes, memories, with you.

But then Life suggests to you that you don't have to live with her anymore, you can go to the  
sauna instead. Where another woman, older and tired than you, sits in companionable silence  
and sighs, both of you unashamed of your striated bellies  
that have flowered and fruited and now simply sit on your thighs contentedly, where you breath  
in the cedar darkness, the heat like love moving deeper and deeper into your tissues, the heat  
wrapping itself around you so that all feels forgiven.

And then Life lets you meet your innocent son outside the sauna and take your  
not-so-painful back to Walgreens where two queenly black ladies in hats  
complain about how their pastor is driving them to drink  
and a young woman on a cell phone tells her friend about a hawk  
that grabbed her Chihuahua and  
you imagine it lifting off into the sky  
it's eyes glistening with terror,  
the girl's hands encircling its trembling body.

Then, Life lets you go home. Where, even though your  
back hurts again, you cook your favorite dinner for your  
daughter and her boyfriend, whom you like,  
and you drink a little too much wine and you reflect  
that you could have been like that Chihuahua, that life  
could have been a hawk and sunk its talons into your hide  
but instead something reached up and caught you and pulled you  
back to earth. And then you smile at your old love across the table,  
the one who would do until something better came along, though  
now you know there is nothing better, and you help yourself  
to another piece of pie.

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