

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, with clothes, with 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 more 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, until, just in time,
the girl's hands encircle 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.