



[Home](#)

[Summer 2014](#)

[Fall-Winter 2013-14](#)

[Summer-Fall 2013](#)

[Spring-Summer 2013](#)

[Winter-Spring 2013](#)

[Fall-Winter 2012-2013](#)

[Summer-Fall 2012](#)

[Spring-Summer 2012](#)

[Winter-Spring 2012](#)

[Autumn/Winter 2011-12](#)

[Summer 2011](#)

[Winter/Spring 2011](#)

[Autumn/Winter 2011](#)

[Summer 2010](#)

[Spring 2010](#)

[Winter 2010](#)

[Autumn 2009](#)

[Summer 2009](#)

[Spring 2009](#)

Two Poems

by Emily Strauss

Mother Would

Mother pushes buttons in a special way:
elevators, adding machines, crosswalk signals,
a long fierce holding for special emphasis
like a doorbell held to show impatience
ringing half a minute through an empty house
then released with a triumph of mastery, having
won a battle a mere stab would never evince.

She does the same dropping a bit of rotten
peach into the kitchen sink, not just setting
the offending matter down but hurling it,
a downward flick of the wrist with a pitcher's
strength in a show of disgust— mashing
that piece of fat, lettuce shank, slice of moldy
cheese: all get the same offended treatment.

Mother is definite about everything—
she plants each leg, watch out if you are a slow
beetle, mauls the door handle when she leaves,
ties her shoes so tight they yelp, pumps the handle
on the liquid soap fiercely, stretches that dish cloth
until it snaps, throws the apple core into the trash
so it knows it can't come back out.

Mother has her ways: determined, precise—
T-shirts folded with military precision, books
ordered by size and type, skirts organized by color,
different-shaped pastas each in their glass bottle,
towels in thirds on the rack, magazines like cocktail
napkins overlapping on the table, throw pillows
at equal angles in each corner of the sofa.

Mother can hug me fiercely or ignore me
absolutely; buy me special blackberry tarts
or serve sliced tomatoes for dinner, forgetting
to cook the rice, sew beautiful quilts and wear
Goodwill T-shirts, remember her hearing aids
only after I've shouted until my throat hurts,
smiling guiltily and rummaging in her tool drawer.

Mother wonders why I visit once a year.

Summer Growth

Autumn 2008	I had forgotten how rounded I have become:
Summer 2008	fleshy, soft, curved like grassy hills
Spring/Summer 2008	rolling up to the sky, or lines sketched quickly
Winter/Spring 2008	to indicate ample stomach and thighs
Editor's Note	in a weekend figure-drawing class,
Guidelines	until I looked in the mirror at the patina
Contact	lining the copper basin that is me;
	maybe I could become a grand tree,
	an oak or madrone, giving off heat
	and autumn scents, spreading with time
	growing thick trunks, the only shade for miles
	on those wavering yellowed hills,
	ample enough for the afternoon moon
	wan and pale as an invalid spinster
	to hide among my leaves and branches.

Emily Strauss has an M.A. in English, but is self-taught in poetry, which she has written since college. Nearly 300 of her poems appear in a wide variety of online venues and in anthologies, in the U.S. and abroad. The natural world is generally her framework; she also considers the stories of people and places around her and personal histories. She is a semi-retired teacher living in California.

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