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
I had forgotten how rounded I have become:

fleshy, soft, curved like grassy hills
rolling up to the sky, or lines sketched quickly
to indicate ample stomach and thighs
in a weekend figure-drawing class,

until I looked in the mirror at the patina
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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