

TABLE SETTING

Mother, your only daughter has prepared
all your favorites-- wild rice and duck,
rose wine, a centerpiece of mauve asters.

Our small silences spread, spots
on linen, condensation creeping down glass.
I pinch my words for doneness.
It takes a long time to make a meal.

How long do mother/daughter banquets last?
It's been years since I left
your dim vault, your steep stairs.
And still we feed at these movable feasts.

Why do you keep saving the torn giftwrap?
Slipping it under my eyelids at bedtime,
crumpling it under my tires on the tollway,
fanning the mustiness of it
as I try to balance my checkbook.

Please. Just eat the good things I've made.
I've sheathed my razor edges, vowed
not to attack your hands.
My voice will not rise tonight.

You sit staring at the cooling skim on food,
the trail of our sentences. I smile
and touch the flowers: "You once
made me a velveteen skirt that color."

You say you don't remember that at all,
and purple only reminds you of pain.
You ignore a second helping
of my dated tidbits, then sniff
the current kettle, declining the ladle
designed for your grip.

After the table is cleared, leftovers
saved for another venue, you pick
at the foil-wrapped roll in your purse
and offer me a broken lozenge
coated with the lint of love.

--Glenna Holloway