

MOTHER/DAUGHTER BANQUET

Let her remember the days I clung to her
while she protected me from dragons:
A neighbor with a switch who thought
I broke his porch light. Vicious pavement
when I learned to skate. A snarling Doberman
chasing me till she ran between us, yelling.
So many dragons vanquished.

She knows they still lurk out there,
waiting in cars, multiplying by dark,
foraging in offices, condos, freeways.
More kinds than she knows. Sometimes
the fiercest of all is the one inside me
uncoiling to attack her hands.

What makes daughters so razorish?
Why must mothers keep the crumpled giftwrap?
Rattling it as you juggle your budget,
blowing dust off of it as you dress for a party.
Reinfecting that ancient cut.

Last year she gave up running in marathons
and riding in steeplechases,
but she still searches my premises for dragons.
I mention her magnificence
with the long-ago Doberman. She says
she doesn't remember that at all. She sniffs
at my servings designed for her plate. We stare
at the family silverware, dab at silences
with linen napkins. We clear the dining room,
cram leftovers in odd places,
punish each other with after-dinner love.

Somehow this movable feast has made us strong.
The armatures within are bent but sturdy
as maple. The table we share is scratched
but failsafe.

And without her I would be hungry.