

## Daughters, Bathe Your Mothers

When you're older and better understand  
her worry over what you wore to church  
(not too dowdy or too nice), her desire  
to teach you how to cook though she hated the task,  
help her fragile form stand in the spray  
and watch how the water streaks her grinning face  
to drip from earlobes like pearls  
that disappear as soon as they form.  
When you're plenty old enough to have your own kids  
(even if you don't), be sure to scrub her back,  
her sunken buttocks. The blue veins  
will show you where to go. No excuses. Be a big girl,  
get in, shed what's between you, and stand behind her  
in case she slips. But she won't. She's rooted  
by the pleasure of water free against her skin,  
unmediated by a washcloth, the pleasure  
of you caring for her. It's been so long  
since she's lost herself in the wonder of her body.  
She's forgotten you're there, so go ahead and revel  
in how the sagging skin that scares you  
still hordes joy and life within its folds.  
And if it's difficult to make your hands  
move over her body like they do your own,  
remind yourself this *was* your body before you had one,  
and soon yours will be all that's left of them both.  
Look at her closely, front and back, the parts you remember  
intimately, the curves no longer there, the scars  
that race blue veins to the finish line.  
This is love. This is time. This is your homeground.

For once you can give back to one  
whom you owe an unpayable debt,  
like giving a gift to God. Do not miss the chance  
to face your past and future all at once,  
to embrace your fear of both and the slick beauty  
of what each of us borrows from the land  
when we're babes and do not understand we must  
(any day now) give it back, let it go.

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