

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.