

AND SO I HAD YOU

I didn't know the mother who rose in the dark
to clean like Cassandra prophesying doom
from unshriven dust, who woke my sister
to push orange sticks deep into corners, rub her hands
raw with scrubbing linoleum, wipe windows
to glittering with newspaper rags. The mother who slept
like one dead in the afternoons, wept
when she couldn't help with homework, brought out
the belt when kids jangled her nerves with crying,
enforced chores and Sunday-going-to-church
and walked home from the post office lock-jawed
with pride when my sister got into State Teacher's College.

My mother took me on Friday night to the bookmobile,
and let me skip Sunday School and chores to read, but
my sister has another story to tell about books, the ones
Mom shelved in dense rows in two suitcases and made
her carry up and down and up and down cellar steps
until she sat down and threw up, but still the baby didn't
come. That was her son now grown to a man;
my sister says that his children spring-sapling
her uneducated winters, and that she took no comfort
when Mom sat and wept with her too, saying,
*I'm doing this for you. No one cared enough to do it
when it happened to me*

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