Unread Letters to My Mother

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Unread Letters to My Mother

Abstract
The poem "Unread Letters to My Mother" is a meditation on dream and memory and how PTSD brought on by childhood trauma has effected those things within the speaker’s life. Each of the seven sections are addressed to the speaker’s mother, but the reader knows these are things which are left unsaid, in the darkness, as the clarity and insight they provide into the speaker’s life is perhaps too overwhelming for the figure of the mother to process.

Keywords
Unread, Letters, Mother, Dissociation, Mental Health

Disciplines
Creative Writing | Poetry

Comments
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1 — The Neighborhood Last August

I had the dream again,
the one where I call out into the darkness
as a figure crawls from what becomes an unlatched window
and I scream and scream until I am awake.

The last lot in the neighborhood is being sold.
Soon there will be no fields left, I mean the kind dotted
with clover, daisies, and those moon dusted blue-violet flowers
whose name I’ve forgotten.

Once I saw a field stretched
out over a long hill, speckled in them.
But that hill homes a house now.

The yards are mostly burnt brown and amber;
the grass feels like straw underfoot.
The dog pulls at the leash with her mouth,
pointing to a robin pecking at the dry earth.

The air is not warm, it hangs heavy
and damp like wet wool. Steel-blue clouds
burden the sky with the promise of rain,
but the rain
never comes.

2 — What the Sea Took

We walked the place where the ocean meets the shore,
cold white sand pressed hard between our toes.
Somewhere along the way I lost the clothespin doll
we made together. I never told you,
but I searched for the doll long after you had fallen asleep.
I could not find her in that moonless night.

3 — Dissociation

I am ten, walking out of the movie theater,
not knowing where I am
or who I am exactly.
I wish I could push
this part of “me” back down onto earth,
or rip it out completely.
How can I make my body move
so it feels real? How can I make
myself move and speak
so nobody knows what’s happening?

Sometimes when I’m driving
I float out of my mind.
I am hovering just a few inches
outside myself.
Soul and body are out of sync,
out of line.
It is as if I am connected
only by a thread.
Perhaps this body is not mine.
I know this body is not mine.
Frantically, I touch that face
and those arms, pinching the skin as if I am dreaming,
trying desperately to reenter our dimension.
This is how I caused the accident.

4 — Lost

Two gloves (in the snow),
a ballet shirt,
my grandfather’s pocket watch (probably stolen),
the clothespin doll,
too many socks,
bobby-pins,
phone numbers,
addresses,
a handmade mitten (I watched it blow away
down a long road one September),
permission slips,
a necklace,
hair ties,
several gold earrings,
graded tests,
your receipts,
blank checks,
eyelashes,
passwords,
nail clippers,
pencils (countless),
your fine tipped marker,
memories,
shopping lists,
pennies,
your trust.

5 — Dreams
I had that dream last night,
the one where I am alone on a road
where the moon is a pale, dead eye.
The one where I watch until the moon blinks
in and out like a star.

From the ages six to ten
I dreamt again and again that I held
a field mouse between two
still hands, only running my thumb
over and over its quivering head.
I never age, it never dies.
Months pass until I rub down its fur,
years pass until I reach its skull,
centuries until I touch it’s brain.
I am shaking, confused and afraid,
the dark of the room closes around me
and the walls of my bedroom become those hands.

I dream, every night,
that I am pushing a lawnmower
up a steep hill. The grass
is tall and yellow, brushing against my knees.
I see something—a red leaf,
a bird— pass across
a too blue sky.
Somehow I am falling
down
the hill,
and I am pulling the lawnmower over me.

This is how I die, a prophesy etched in my brain.
I awake in a cold sweat, feverish and screaming.
Do I wake you?

6 — Dissociation II

I am four years old
sitting alone in my room,
knees pressed to my face.
From out of nowhere
the feeling that “I” am a consciousness
pressed unwillingly onto another
body, another person, surrounds me.
It is as if the “I” is not the true owner
of the body. Perhaps the real “me”
is trying to get rid of it, trying to be good,
trying to be normal.

I am twenty and driving down a mountain.
I can feel it starting to happen.
It shouldn’t, but I can’t control it.
Minutes and miles pass that I cannot see.
Too soon I am in town,
cruising up to a stop light.
I am back, but time moves too slowly
and I don’t see the light change
or the brake lights in front of me.
I don’t hit the brakes fast enough.
Three cars dented,
their ends pushed in like crushed soda cans.
A thanks is an empty prayer, but no one was hurt.
You tried to ask me about it,
my mind blank with anxiety and guilt,

I don’t remember,
I don’t remember,

I don’t know if I’m running.

7 — Mother Dearest

In pre-school the teachers told you
that they thought I had amnesia.
You know too well that I don’t hear
what you say, I have what you call, “selective hearing”.
You are red-faced,
screaming, but I cannot hear
you, I can not remember what you asked of me
ten minutes ago, how we got here.

I remember only that I am afraid.
In the dark, I remember the smell
of your mother-in-law’s cottage,
sticky-thick quilts,
how that woman pressed herself too close to me
at night. It does not matter
what she did or said to me. I was a child. I remember
how I cried and cried
and told you to keep her away from me.

It’s not your fault,

it’s not your fault,

I will never blame you.

I can not even trust what I know
to be real.