1. **Catholic Mother**  
Francis X D’Souza  
father of the year.  
Here he is top left  
the one smiling.  
By the grace of God he says  
we’ve had seven children  
(in seven years).  
We’re One Big Happy Family  
God Always Provides  
India will Suffer for  
her Wicked Ways  
(these Hindu buggers got no ethics).  
Pillar of the Church  
says the parish priest  
Lovely Catholic Family  
says Mother Superior  
The pillar’s wife  
says nothing.

De Souza, Eunice. „Catholic Mother“. *Nine Indian Women Poets – An Anthology.*  

2. **In Celebration of My Uterus**  
Everyone in me is a bird.  
I am beating all my wings.  
They wanted to cut you out  
but they will not.  
They said you were immeasurably empty  
but you are not.
They said you were sick unto dying
but they were wrong.
You are singing like a school girl.
You are not torn.
Sweet weight,
in celebration of the woman I am
and of the soul of the woman I am
and of the central creature and its delight
I sing for you. I dare to live.
Hello, spirit. Hello, cup.
Fasten, cover. Cover that does contain.
Hello to the soil of the fields.
Welcome, roots.
Each cell has a life.
There is enough here to please a nation.
It is enough that the populace own these goods.
Any person, any commonwealth would say of it,
“It is good this year that we may plant again
and think forward to a harvest.
A blight had been forecast and has been cast out.”
Many women are singing together of this:
one is in a shoe factory cursing the machine,
one is at the aquarium tending a seal,
one is dull at the wheel of her Ford,
one is at the toll gate collecting,
one is tying the cord of a calf in Arizona,
one is straddling a cello in Russia,
one is shifting pots on the stove in Egypt,
one is painting her bedroom walls moon color,
one is dying but remembering a breakfast,
one is stretching on her mat in Thailand,
one is wiping the ass of her child,
one is staring out the window of a train
in the middle of Wyoming and one is
anywhere and some are everywhere and all
seem to be singing, although some can not
sing a note.
Sweet weight,
in celebration of the woman I am
let me carry a ten-foot scarf,
let me drum for the nineteen-year-olds,
let me carry bowls for the offering
(if that is my part).
Let me study the cardiovascular tissue,
let me examine the angular distance of meteors,
let me suck on the stems of flowers
(if that is my part).
Let me make certain tribal figures
(if that is my part).
For this thing the body needs
let me sing
for the supper,
for the kissing,
for the correct
yes.


3. poem in praise of menstruation (Lucille Clifton did not use any punctuation
or capitalization, purposely in the poem)

if there is a river
more beautiful than this
bright as the blood
red edge of the moon        if
there is a river
more faithful than this
returning each month
to the same delta if there
is a river
braver than this
coming and coming in a surge
of passion, of pain if there is
a river
more ancient than this
daughter of eve
mother of cain and of abel if there is in
the universe such a river if
there is some where water
more powerful than this wild
water
pray that it flows also
through animals
beautiful and faithful and ancient
and female and brave

Lucille Clifton, “poem in praise of menstruation” Poetry Foundation . org. 2015,

4. Metaphors
I’am a riddle in nine syllables.
riddle in nine syllables,
An elephant, a ponderous house,
A melon strolling on two tendrils.
O red fruit, ivory, fine timbers!
This loaf’s big with its yeasty rising.
Money’s new-minted in this fat purse.
I’m a means, a stage, a cow in calf.
I’ve eaten a bag of green apples,  
Boarded the train there’s no getting off.

Sylvia, Plath. “Morning Song.” Academy of American Poets presents: Poets forum,  
2/01/metap-hors-by-sylvia-plath/>

5. Labour
For nine months I had borne him in my womb.  
Nine months of disillusionment and pain  
Relieved only occasionally by the gentle kicking within me;  
The gentle movement of the life I created within me  
Nine months I waited for this day;  
Nine months and the grotesque lump growing on me.  
And Kit making numerous sacrifices – of patience and love –  
Nine dreary months of waiting for this day.  
And now I was beginning to feel sharp pains in me –  
And mama saying they are labour pains –  
The pains which will be the spring of new life...  
Would it be a boy, I thought with intensified wonder,  
– How proud his father would be,  
– Or would it be a girl –  
Someone I could teach to be just like me  
And spoil with pretty frocks  
And sweetly scented flowers to adorn her head?  
I looked up into Kit’s eyes  
– The eyes that had seen me through  
– The eyes that had known my sadness and joy for nine months  
And I saw in them all love and care  
– The pain which he felt for me  
And like the sun on a cold morning  
Relieved me of all fright, all desolation.  
I looked with warm contemplation
To the moment when his warm embrace would say
‘Our own baby – the very essence of our love
And tiny little hands would cling to my breasts in hunger
Tiny mouth drawing warm milk from me
An innocent little face looking into my face.
With trust
Learning me, just as Kit did.
I felt him, Kit
Captured by a foresight of summer days to come
The days when we – no longer just two –
Would walk in the dusk
Caressed by the warm breeze
And our child would learn to sing the birds to sleep
And dance the kan-kan with the fireflies.
And thus I was borne to the labour ward
Whilst Kit waited
– Waited again
– Waited in warm anticipation
– Waited for the awakening of my new beginning


6. She Came in Silken Drapes
She came in silken drapes
and naked breasts,
Veiled Artemis; seated
On an eagle’s nest
Brandishing the sword
and that forbidden thing
Less clumsy in a dream
She handed me the word
Sealed in cotton wool
Tied in an endless riddle
Love and loveless hate
Poison of the coral snake
Infinitely tender to see
Like Saturn’s mystery.
Gentle winged butterfly
with the voiceless cry by day –
Huntress of crippled manhood
Unequal tyrant by night
Visiting the caves of Hysterus
Where the wounded leopard sleeps
In the green light of peace.
Walking in the mist
Among the chambered Monuments
Crowded like icicles
In the patient current
Which feeds by exhaustion,
She smoothes her wrinkles
And prepares for the assault.
Love, lustreless word
A thousand times misused
As often bathed in blood.
Let me wash you
Like the frenzied gold-sifter
Let me lead you
through the dense crowd
over the phallic mound
To the crystal spring
Where I have found
the purest living thing.

110–111

7. Sister, You Cannot Think a Baby Out!

Day after day
Week after week
Month after month
Life within me
I, amazed to feel it grow
Unable to comprehend
the mystery
I, afraid of pain
Not like anything I know
Is knowledge power?
Is ignorance bliss?
The first kick, energetic,
Pleasant, moving pain.
Will the rest be the same?
An old Lamaze book
On a dusty shelf
Breathe in, breathe out,
Breathe life.
Sisters laughing at you
At Lamaze too
At all the books you read!
When pain tightly grips
And Queen Nature reigns powerful,
Who remembers?
Sister, you cannot think a baby out!
Giant octopus
Tentacles in disarray
My body knows not
How to channel the pain.
A lull at last
Soothing balm on a raw wound
Then, suddenly, a dam gives way
The water breaks.
Surprised at the mighty flow
I lie, soaked in pain and fear.
An iron hand grips my womb
And viciously lets go
grips, lets go,
Again and again
Faster and faster
Sweating pearls all over my brown skin
Eyes wide open in disbelief
Never knew I could be
such a good contortionist!
Exhausted
I muster my energies
Like a volcano
Erupting a living force!
A last pang, excruciating
And, before I know
A thunderlike scream goes
As comes into this world
The baby
With the joyous scream of life.
Yes, I know
You cannot think a baby out!


8. Birthing
ah carry she cross water
ah carry she cross lan
ah carry she
wid all dignity
ah born she on a day
like balm
a day of potency
wen spirits warm
an cluster roun
an smelt of milk
like she


9. Spell for Birth
God the mother
God the daughter
God the holy spirit
Triune of love
Triune of grace
Stream take you
Current aid you
Earth receive you
God the mother
God the daughter
God the holy spirit
Triune of grace
Triune of power.


10. Morning Song
Love set you going like a fat gold watch.
The midwife slapped your footsoles, and your bald cry
Took its place among the elements.

Our voices echo, magnifying your arrival. New statue.
In a drafty museum, your nakedness
Shadows our safety. We stand round blankly as walls.
I’m no more your mother
Than the cloud that distills a mirror to reflect its own slow
Effacement at the wind’s hand.
All night your moth-breath
Flickers among the flat pink roses. I wake to listen:
A far sea moves in my ear.
One cry, and I stumble from bed, cow-heavy and floral
In my Victorian nightgown.
Your mouth opens clean as a cat’s. The window square
Whitens and swallows its dull stars. And now you try
Your handful of notes;
The clear vowels rise like balloons.


11. Songs for My Son

I
My son cries
the cats answer
I hover over his sleeping
suspended on his milk-stained breath
I live in fear of his hurt, his death.
The fear is real
if I close my eyes when it is at its height
I see him curled man-in-miniature asleep.
I hover over his milk-stained breath
and listen for its rise
every one an assurance that he is alive
and if God bargains
I strike a deal with him
for his life I owe you something, anything
but please let no harm come to him.
The cat cries
my son answers
his sleep is short
his stomach hurts.

II
They gather from beyond
Through the trees they come
gather on the banks of the family river
one by one they raise the keening song
great grandmother Rebecca of the healing hands
Tata Edward, Bucky, and Brownman
my father’s lost mother Maria
and now my father
come to sing the birthsong
and Hannah horsewoman to ride me through.
It’s a son, a great grand grandson, a man
born to a headstrong, heartfoolish woman,
part the birth waters with river-washed hands
and let the newson through,
woman born of strong-limbed woman
woman born to parents in peacetime
behold your son
flesh of your flesh
your life’s work begun.

III
The mid-wife
tie-head African woman
fingers like healing-roots
feeds me thyme-tea
to hurry on your coming
summons the appropriate spirits
to witness your crowning,
a knife keen with garlic
to sever you from me
and we’ll never smell its primal top-notes
you or I
without memories of our joining.

IV
I’ll name you Miles I say
for the music, and for coming
a long way
you suck, my womb pulls
the thirst constant
the connection three-way


12. For Rita’s Daughter, Just Born
Luminous new leaf
May the sun rise gently
on your unfurling
in the courtyard always linger
the smell of earth after rain
the stone of these steps
stay cool and cold
gods in the niches
old brass on the wall
never the shrill cry of kites


13. Little Girl, My String Bean, My Lovely Woman
By Anne Sexton | Poem
My daughter, at eleven(almost twelve),
is like a garden.
Oh, darling! Born in that sweet birthday suit
and having owned it and known it for so long,
now you must watch high noon enter -
noon, that ghost hour.
Oh, funny little girl – this one under a blueberry sky,
this one! How can I say that I've known
just what you know and just where you are?
It's not a strange place, this odd home
where your face sits in my hand
so full of distance,
so full of its immediate fever.
The summer has seized you,
as when, last month in Amalfi, I saw
lemons as large as your desk-side globe -
that miniature map of the world -
and I could mention, too,
the market stalls of mushrooms
and garlic buds all engorged.
Or I think even of the orchard next door,
where the berries are done
and the apples are beginning to swell.
And once, with our first backyard,
I remember I planted an acre of yellow beans
we couldn't eat.
Oh, little girl,
my stringbean,
how do you grow?
You grow this way.
You are too many to eat.
I hear
as in a dream
the conversation of the old wives
speaking of womanhood.
I remember that I heard nothing myself.
I was alone.
I waited like a target.
Let high noon enter –
the hour of the ghosts.
Once the Romans believed
that noon was the ghost hour,
and I can believe it, too,
under that startling sun,
and someday they will come to you,
someday, men bare to the waist, young Romans
at noon where they belong,
with ladders and hammers
while no one sleeps.
But before they enter
I will have said,
Your bones are lovely,
and before their strange hands
there was always this hand that formed.
Oh, darling, let your body in,
let it tie you in,
in comfort.
What I want to say, Linda,
is that women are born twice.
If I could have watched you grow
as a magical mother might,
if I could have seen through my magical transparent belly,
there would have been such a ripening within:
your embryo,
the seed taking on its own,
life clapping the bedpost,
bones from the pond,
thumbs and two mysterious eyes,
the awfully human head,
the heart jumping like a puppy,
the important lungs,
the becoming -
while it becomes!
as it does now,
a world of its own,
a delicate place.
I say hello
to such shakes and knockings and high jinks,
such music, such sprouts,
such dancing-mad-bears of music,
such necessary sugar,
such goings-on!
Oh, little girl,
my stringbean,
how do you grow?
You grow this way.
You are too many to eat.
What I want to say, Linda,
is that there is nothing in your body that lies.
All that is new is telling the truth.
I'm here, that somebody else,
an old tree in the background.
Darling,
stand still at your door,
sure of yourself, a white stone, a good stone -
as exceptional as laughter
you will strike fire,
that new thing!

Sexton Anne, Little Girl, My Stringbean, My Lovely Woman. The New Yorker, August 7, 1965 P. 30
14. Mother, A Cradle to Hold Me

- Maya Angelou

It is true
I was created in you.
It is also true
That you were created for me.
I owned your voice.
It was shaped and tuned to soothe me.
Your arms were molded
Into a cradle to hold me, to rock me.
The scent of your body was the air
Perfumed for me to breathe.
Mother,
During those early, dearest days
I did not dream that you had
A large life which included me,
For I had a life
Which was only you.
Time passed steadily and drew us apart.
I was unwilling.
I feared if I let you go
You would leave me eternally.
You smiled at my fears, saying
I could not stay in your lap forever.
That one day you would have to stand
And where would I be?
You smiled again.
I did not.
Without warning you left me,
But you returned immediately.
You left again and returned,
I admit, quickly,
But relief did not rest with me easily.
You left again, but again returned.
You left again, but again returned.
Each time you reentered my world
You brought assurance.
Slowly I gained confidence.
You thought you know me,
But I did know you,
You thought you were watching me,
But I did hold you securely in my sight,
Recording every moment,
Memorizing your smiles, tracing your frowns.
In your absence
I rehearsed you,
The way you had of singing
On a breeze,
While a sob lay
At the root of your song.
The way you posed your head
So that the light could caress your face
When you put your fingers on my hand
And your hand on my arm,
I was blessed with a sense of health,
Of strength and very good fortune.
You were always
the heart of happiness to me,
Bringing nougats of glee,
Sweets of open laughter.
I loved you even during the years
When you knew nothing
And I knew everything, I loved you still.
Condescendingly of course,
From my high perch
Of teenage wisdom.
I spoke sharply of you, often
Because you were slow to understand.
I grew older and
Was stunned to find
How much knowledge you had gleaned.
And so quickly.
Mother, I have learned enough now
To know I have learned nearly nothing.
On this day
When mothers are being honored,
Let me thank you
That my selfishness, ignorance, and mockery
Did not bring you to
Discard me like a broken doll
Which had lost its favor.
I thank you that
You still find something in me
To cherish, to admire and to love.
I thank you, Mother.
I love you.

15. An Introduction
I don’t know politics but I know the names
Of those in power, and I can repeat them like
Days of week, or names of months, beginning with
Nehru. I am Indian, very brown, born in
Malabar, I speak three languages, write in
Two, dream in one. Don’t write in English, they said,
English is not your mother-tongue. Why not leave
Me alone? critics, friends, visiting cousins,
Every one of you? Why not let me speak in
Any language I like? The language I speak
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses
All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half
Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,
It is human as I am human, don’t
You see? It voices my joys, my longings, my
Hopes, and it is useful to me as cawing
Is to crows or roaring to the lions, it
Is human speech, the speech of the mind that is
Here and not there, a mind that sees and hears and
Is aware. Not the deaf, blind speech
Of trees in storm or of monsoon clouds or of rain or the
Incoherent mutterings of the blazing
Funeral pyre. I was child, and later they
Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs
Swelled and one or two places sprouted hair. When
I asked for love, not knowing what else to ask
For, he drew a youth of sixteen into the
Bedroom and closed the door. He did not beat me
But my sad woman-body felt so beaten.
The weight of my breasts and womb crushed me. I shrank pitifully. Then ...I wore a shirt and my Brother’s trousers, cut my hair short and ignored My womanliness. Dress in sarees, be girl Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook, Be a quarreller with servants. Fit in. Oh, Belong, cried the categorizers. Don’t sit On walls or peep in through our lace-draped windows. Be Amy, or be Kamala. Or, better Still, be Madhavikutty. It is time to Choose a name, a role. Don’t play pretending games. Don’t play at schizophrenia or be a Nympho. Don’t cry embarrassingly loud when Jilted in love...I met a man, loved him. Call Him not by any name, he is every man Who wants a woman, just as I am every Woman who seeks love. In him...The hungry haste Of rivers, in me ...the oceans’ tireless Waiting. Who are you, I ask each and everyone, The answer is, it is I. Anywhere and, Everywhere, I see the one who calls himself If in this world, he is tightly packed like the Sword in its sheath. It is I who drink lonely Drinks at twelve, midnight, in hotels of strange towns, It is I who laugh, it is I who make love And then, feel shame, it is I who lie dying With a rattle in my throat. I am sinner, I am saint. I am the beloved and the Betrayed. I have no joys which are not yours, no Aches which are not yours. I too call myself I.

16. Cinema Eyes

Don’t want you to go to the Cinema –
Yes, I know you are eighteen,
I know your friends go,
I know you want to go.
I used to go to the Cinema
To see beautiful white faces.
How I worshipped them!
How beautiful they seemed –
I grew up with a cinema mind.
My ideal man would be a Cinema type –
No kinky haired man for me,
No black face, no black children for me.
I would take care
Not to get sun burnt,
To care my half Indian hair
To look like my cinema stars.
I saw no beauty in black faces,
The tender light and beauty
Of their eyes I did not see;
The smoothness of their skin,
The mellow music of their voice,
The stateliness of their walk,
The tenderness of their hearts
No, they were black
And therefore had no virtue.

17. Sweet Sixteen

Well, you can’t say
they didn’t try.
Mamas never mentioned menses.
A nun screamed: You vulgar girls
don’t say brassières
say bracelets.
She pinned paper sleeves
onto her sleeveless dresses.
The preacher thundered:
Never go with a man alone
Never alone
and even if you’re engaged
only passionless kisses.
At sixteen, Phoebe asked me:
Can it happen when you’re in a dance hall
I mean, you know what,
getting preggers and all that, when
you’re dancing?
I, sixteen, assured her
you could.

De Souza, Eunice. “Sweet Seventeen”. The Oxford Indian Anthology of Twelve

18. Purdah I

One day they said
she was old enough to learn some shame.
She found it came quite naturally.
Purdah is a kind of safety.
The body finds a place to hide.
The cloth fans out against the skin
much like the earth that falls
on coffins after they put the dead men in.
People she has known
stand up, sit down as they have always done
But they make different angles
in the light, their eyes aslant,
a little sly.
She half-remembers things
from someone else’s life,
perhaps from yours, or mine –
carefully carrying what we do not own:
between the thighs, a sense of sin.
We sit still, letting the cloth grow
a little closer to our skin.
A light filters inward
through our bodies’ walls.
Voices speak inside us,
echoing in the spaces we have just left.
She stands outside herself,
sometimes in all four corners of a room.
Wherever she goes, she is always
inching past herself,
as if she were a clod of earth,
and the roots as well, scratching for a hold
between the first and second rib.
Passing constantly out of her hands
into the corner of someone else’s eyes...
while doors keep opening
inward and again inward.

19. Purdah II

They have all been sold and bought,
the girls I knew,
unwilling virgins who had been taught,
especially in this strangers’ land, to bind
their brightness tightly round,
whatever they might wear,
in the purdah of the mind.
They veiled their eyes
with heavy lids.
They hid their breasts,
but not the fullness of their lips.
The men you knew
were in your history, striding proud
with heavy feet across a fertile land.
A horde of dead men
held up your head,
above the mean temptations
of those alien hands.
You answered to your race.
Night after virtuous night.
You performed for them.
They warmed your bed.
***
A coin of comfort in the mosque
clatters down the years of loss.
***
You never met those men
with burnt-out eyes, blood
dripping from their beards.
You remember the sun
pouring out of Maulvi’s hands.
It was to save the child
the lamb was sacrificed;
to save the man,
the sourge and stones. God was justice.
Justice could be dread.
But woman. Woman,
you have learnt
that when God comes
you hide your face.
There are so many of me.
I have met them, meet them every day,
recognise their shadows on the streets.
I know their past and future
in the cautious way they place their feet.
I can see behind their veils,
and before they speak
I know their tongues, thick
with the burr of Birmingham
or Leeds.


20. Purdah

Jade-
Stone of the side,
The agonized
Side of green Adam, I
Smile, cross-legged,
Enigmatical,
Shifting my clarities.
So valuable!
How the sun polishes this shoulder!
And should
The moon, my
Indefatigable cousin
Rise, with her cancerous pallors,
Dragging trees –
Little bushy polyps,
Little nets,
My visibilities hide.
I gleam like a mirror.
At this facet the bridegroom arrives
Lord of the mirrors!
It is himself he guides
In among these silk
Screens, these rustling appurtenances.
I breathe, and the mouth
Veil stirs its curtain
My eye
Veil is
A concatenation of rainbows.
I am his.
Even in his
Absence, I
Revolve in my
Sheath of impossibles,
Priceless and quiet
Among these parakeets, macaws!
O chatterers
Attendants of the eyelash!
I shall unloose
One feather, like the peacock.
Attendants of the lip!
I shall unloose
One note
Shattering
The chandelier
Of air that all day flies
Its christals
A million ignorants.
Attendants!
Attendants!
And at his next step
I shall unloose
I shall unloose –
From the small jewelled
Doll he guards like a heart –
The lioness,
The shriek in the bath,
The cloak of holes.


21.Medusa
Off that landspit of stony mouth-plugs,
Eyes rolled by white sticks,
Ears cupping the sea's incoherences,
You house your unnerving head—God-ball,
Lens of mercies,
Your stooges
Plying their wild cells in my keel's shadow,
Pushing by like hearts,
Red stigmata at the very center,
Riding the rip tide to the nearest point of departure,
Dragging their Jesus hair.
Did I escape, I wonder?
My mind winds to you
Old barnacled umbilicus, Atlantic cable,
Keeping itself, it seems, in a state of miraculous repair.
In any case, you are always there,
Tremulous breath at the end of my line,
Curve of water upleaping
To my water rod, dazzling and grateful,
Touching and sucking.
I didn't call you.
I didn't call you at all.
Nevertheless, nevertheless
You steamed to me over the sea,
Fat and red, a placenta
Paralyzing the kicking lovers.
Cobra light
Squeezing the breath from the blood bells
Of the fuchsia. I could draw no breath,
Dead and moneyless,
Overexposed, like an X-ray.
Who do you think you are?
A Communion wafer? Blubbery Mary?
I shall take no bite of your body,
Bottle in which I live,
Ghastly Vatican.
I am sick to death of hot salt.
Green as eunuchs, your wishes
Hiss at my sins.
Off, off, eely tentacle!
There is nothing between us

22. Double Image

1.

I am thirty this November.
You are still small, in your fourth year.
We stand watching the yellow leaves go queer,
flapping in the winter rain.
falling flat and washed. And I remember
mostly the three autumns you did not live here.
They said I'd never get you back again.
I tell you what you'll never really know:
all the medical hypothesis
that explained my brain will never be as true as these
struck leaves letting go.
I, who chose two times
to kill myself, had said your nickname
the mewling mouths when you first came;
until a fever rattled
in your throat and I moved like a pantomine
above your head. Ugly angels spoke to me. The blame,
I heard them say, was mine. They tattled
like green witches in my head, letting doom
leak like a broken faucet;
as if doom had flooded my belly and filled your bassinet,
an old debt I must assume.
Death was simpler than I'd thought.
The day life made you well and whole
I let the witches take away my guilty soul.
I pretended I was dead
until the white men pumped the poison out,
putting me armless and washed through the rigamarole
of talking boxes and the electric bed.
I laughed to see the private iron in that hotel.
Today the yellow leaves
go queer. You ask me where they go I say today believed
in itself, or else it fell.
Today, my small child, Joyce,
love your self's self where it lives.
There is no special God to refer to; or if there is,
why did I let you grow
in another place. You did not know my voice
when I came back to call. All the superlatives
of tomorrow's white tree and mistletoe
will not help you know the holidays you had to miss.
The time I did not love
myself, I visited your shoveled walks; you held my glove.
There was new snow after this.
2.
They sent me letters with news
of you and I made moccasins that I would never use.
When I grew well enough to tolerate
myself, I lived with my mother, the witches said.
But I didn't leave. I had my portrait
done instead.
Part way back from Bedlam
I came to my mother's house in Gloucester,
Massachusetts. And this is how I came
to catch at her; and this is how I lost her.
I cannot forgive your suicide, my mother said.
And she never could. She had my portrait
done instead.
I lived like an angry guest,
like a partly mended thing, an outgrown child.
I remember my mother did her best.
She took me to Boston and had my hair restyled.
Your smile is like your mother's, the artist said.
I didn't seem to care. I had my portrait done instead.
There was a church where I grew up with its white cupboards where they locked us up, row by row, like puritans or shipmates singing together. My father passed the plate. Too late to be forgiven now, the witches said. I wasn't exactly forgiven. They had my portrait done instead.

3.
All that summer sprinklers arched over the seaside grass. We talked of drought while the salt-parched field grew sweet again. To help time pass I tried to mow the lawn and in the morning I had my portrait done, holding my smile in place, till it grew formal. Once I mailed you a picture of a rabbit and a postcard of Motif number one, as if it were normal to be a mother and be gone. They hung my portrait in the chill north light, matching me to keep me well. Only my mother grew ill. She turned from me, as if death were catching, as if death transferred, as if my dying had eaten inside of her. That August you were two, by I timed my days with doubt.
On the first of September she looked at me
and said I gave her cancer.
They carved her sweet hills out
and still I couldn't answer.

4.
That winter she came
part way back
from her sterile suite
of doctors, the seasick
cruise of the X-ray,
the cells' arithmetic
gone wild. Surgery incomplete,
the fat arm, the prognosis poor, I heard
them say.
During the sea blizzards
she had here
own portrait painted.
A cave of mirror
placed on the south wall;
matching smile, matching contour.
And you resembled me; unacquainted
with my face, you wore it. But you were mine
after all.
I wintered in Boston,
childless bride,
nothing sweet to spare
with witches at my side.
I missed your babyhood,
tried a second suicide,
tried the sealed hotel a second year.
On April Fool you fooled me. We laughed and this
was good.
5.
I checked out for the last time
on the first of May;
graduate of the mental cases,
with my analysts's okay,
my complete book of rhymes,
my typewriter and my suitcases.
All that summer I learned life
back into my own
seven rooms, visited the swan boats,
the market, answered the phone,
served cocktails as a wife
should, made love among my petticoats
and August tan. And you came each
weekend. But I lie.
You seldom came. I just pretended
you, small piglet, butterfly
girl with jelly bean cheeks,
disobedient three, my splendid
stranger. And I had to learn
why I would rather
die than love, how your innocence
would hurt and how I gather
guilt like a young intern
his symptoms, his certain evidence.
That October day we went
to Gloucester the red hills
reminded me of the dry red fur fox
coat I played in as a child; stock still
like a bear or a tent,
like a great cave laughing or a red fur fox.
We drove past the hatchery,
the hut that sells bait,
past Pigeon Cove, past the Yacht Club, past Squall's
Hill, to the house that waits
still, on the top of the sea,
and two portraits hung on the opposite walls.

6.
In north light, my smile is held in place,
the shadow marks my bone.
What could I have been dreaming as I sat there,
all of me waiting in the eyes, the zone
of the smile, the young face,
the foxes' snare.
In south light, her smile is held in place,
her cheeks wilting like a dry
orchid; my mocking mirror, my overthrown
love, my first image. She eyes me from that face
that stony head of death
I had outgrown.
The artist caught us at the turning;
we smiled in our canvas home
before we chose our foreknown separate ways.
The dry redfur fox coat was made for burning.
I rot on the wall, my own
Dorian Gray.
And this was the cave of the mirror,
that double woman who stares
at herself, as if she were petrified
in time - two ladies sitting in umber chairs.
You kissed your grandmother
and she cried.

7.
I could not get you back
except for weekends. You came
each time, clutching the picture of a rabbit
that I had sent you. For the last time I unpack
your things. We touch from habit.
The first visit you asked my name.
Now you will stay for good. I will forget
how we bumped away from each other like marionettes
on strings. It wasn't the same
as love, letting weekends contain
us. You scrape your knee. You learn my name,
wobbling up the sidewalk, calling and crying.
You can call me mother and I remember my mother again,
somewhere in greater Boston, dying.
I remember we named you Joyce
so we could call you Joy.
You came like an awkward guest
that first time, all wrapped and moist
and strange at my heavy breast.
I needed you. I didn't want a boy,
only a girl, a small milky mouse
of a girl, already loved, already loud in the house
of herself. We named you Joy.
I, who was never quite sure
about being a girl, needed another
life, another image to remind me.
And this was my worst guilt; you could not cure
or soothe it. I made you to find me.

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/238184>
I
I may raise my child in this man’s house
or that man’s love,
warm her on this one’s smile, wean
her to that one’s wit,
praise or blame at a chosen moment,
in a considered way, say
yes or no, true, false, tomorrow
not today...
Finally, who will she be
when the choices are made,
when the choosers are dead,
and of the men I love, the teeth are left
chattering with me underground?
Just the sum of me
and this or that other?
Who can she be but, helplessly,
herself?

II
Some day your head won’t find my lap
so easily. Trust is a habit you’ll soon break.
Once, stroking a kitten’s head
through a haze of fur, I was afraid
of my own hand big and strong and quivering
with the urge to crush.
Here, in the neck’s strong curve, the cradling arm,
love leers close to violence.
Your head too fragile, child,
under a mist of hair.
Home is this space in my lap, till the body reforms,
tissues stretch, flesh turns firm.
Your kitten-bones will harden,
grow away from me, till you and I are sure
we are both safe.

III
I spent years hiding from your face,
the weight of your arms, warmth
of your breath. Through feverish nights,
dreaming of you, the watchdogs of virtue
and obedience crouched on my chest. ‘Shake
them off,’ I told myself, and did. Wallowed
in small perversities, celebrated as they came
of age, matured to sins.
I call this freedom now,
watch the word cavort luxuriously, strut
my independence across whole continents
of sheets.
But turning from the grasp
of arms, the rasp of breath,
to look through darkened windows at the night,
Mother, I find you staring back at me.
When did my body agree
to wear your face?

24. Kalika

In the morning, while Kalika combs
her seven-year-old daughter’s glossy tangled hair,
she looks at her face in the mirror;
red-eyed, worn out,
she feels she has grown into a mangy stranger overnight.
Her daughter’s face: wide open eyes
so much more like her mother’s
who died last night
in a diabetic coma.
As Kalika parts the hair in the centre,
a straight line curving down
the back of her daughter’s head;
she remembers, five years ago
blisters on the back of her mother’s head
grew and grew, never healing,
her mother’s scalp cracked and bleeding
until the doctor shaved off
the waist-length thick grey hair
and tightly bandaged the head.
As Kalika watches her daughter open the door
the sun falls on the bright red ribbons
flowering at the ends of the freshly made braids,
and there is her mother in a red sari,
walking towards the sound of temple bells.
Green herbs, white jasmine in her hands,
tiny red blossoms woven in her coiling hair.
Later, tearing out sticky cobwebs
from corners in the high ceiling,
while jabbing at fleeing spiders with a long-handled broom,
Kalika winces, glances out the window
and sees her daughter on the lawn
struggling with her doll’s matted hair.

25. Child

You hold the toy at me
as if it were the last barrier.
Your little Christmas elephant
with its ears all pink.
You are shy and move away.
So I must stay here for a bit
like the proverbial mountain,
wait till some last smile
can measure your frown and replace it.
Your experience of three years
has made you wise.
And though you know the sun
must daily sink into the sea,
you will not trust my adult face,
my dangling arms.
I talk too fluently,
and smile too often and too long.
But I’ve not come to stay.
Yet, I can feel the hundred things
you’d like to say
choke
as if the alphabets had jagged ends
that fixed inside your throat.
Sometimes, your head on one side
you venture, tentative,
brother of the sparrow.
You won’t be kissed.
I too was a child my dear,
my heart as large as your fist.

26. I'm My Own Mother, Now
by Stella Chipasula
Mother, I am mothering you now;
Alone, I bear the burden of continuity.
Inside me, you are coiled
like a hard question without an answer.
On the far bank of the river
you sit silently, your mouth shut,
watching me struggle with this bundle
that grows like a giant seed, in me.
In your closed fist you hide
the riddles of the fruit or clay child
you told before you turned your back
and walked, fading, into the mist.
But, mother, I am mothering you now;
new generations pass through my blood,
and I bear you proudly on my back
where you are no longer a question


27. For My Mother (May I Inherit Half Her Strength)
My mother loved my father
I write this as an absolute
in this my thirtieth year
the year to discard absolutes
he appeared, her fate disguised,
he had ridden from a country
one hundred miles south of hers.
She tells he dressed the part, 
visiting dandy, maroon blazer 
cream serge pants, seam like razor, 
and the beret and the two-tone shoes. 
My father stopped to speak to her sister, 
till he looked and saw her by the oleander, 
sure in the kingdom of my blue-eyed grandmother. 
He never played the cricket match that day. 
He wooed her with words and he won her. 
He had nothing but words to woo her, 
On a visit to distant Kingston he wrote, 
‘I stood on the corner of King Street and looked, 
and not one woman in that town was lovely as you’. 
My mother was a child of the petite bourgeoisie 
studying to be a teacher, she oiled her hands 
to hold pens. 
My father barely knew his father, his mother died young, 
he was a boy who grew with his granny. 
My mother’s trousseau came by steamer through the snows of Montreal 
where her sisters Alberta of the cheekbones and the 
perennial Rose, combed Jewlit backstreets with Frenchturned names for Doris’ wedding things. 
Such a wedding Harvey River, Hanover, had never seen 
Who anywhere had seen a veil fifteen chantilly yards long? 
and a crepe de chine dress with inlets of silk godettes 
and a neck-line clasped with jewelled pins! 
And on her wedding day she wept. For it was a brazen bride in those days 
who smiled. 
and her bouquet looked for the world like a sheaf of wheat 
against the unknown of her belly, 
a sheaf of wheat backed by maidenhair fern, representing Harvey
River
her face was washed by something other than river water.
My father made an assertive move, he took the imported cherub down
from the heights of the cake and dropped it in the soft territory between her breasts ... and she cried.

When I came to know my mother many years later, I knew her as the figure who sat at the first thing I learned to read: ‘SINGER’, and she breast-fed my brother while she sewed; and she taught us to read while she sewed and she sat in judgement over all our disputes as she sewed.
She could work miracles, she would make a garment from a square of cloth in a span that defied time. Or feed twenty people on a stew made from fallen-from-the-head cabbage leaves and a carrot and a cho-cho and a palmful of meat.
And she rose early and sent us clean into the world and she went to bed in the dark, for my father came in always last.
There is a place somewhere where my mother never took the younger ones a country where my father with the always smile my father whom all women loved, who had the perpetual quality of wonder given only to a child...hurt his bride.
Even at his death there was this ‘Friend’ who stood at her side, but my mother is adamant that that has no place in the memory of my father.
When he died, she sewed dark dresses for the women among us
and she summoned that walk, straight-backed, that she gave to us
and buried him dry-eyed.
Just that morning, weeks after
she stood delivering bananas from their skin
singing in that flat hill country voice
she fell down a note to the realisation that she did
not have to be brave, just this once
and she cried.
For her hands grown coarse with raising nine children
for her body for twenty years permanently fat
for the time she pawned her machine for my sister’s
Senior Cambridge fees
and for the pain she bore with the eyes of a queen
and she cried also because she loved him.

Goodison, Lorna. “For My Mother (May I Inherit Half Her Strength)”. I am
46–48.

MOTHERHOOD – OPPRESSION AND DELIGHT

28.Zarina’s Mother
It’s not that Zarina’s mother is callous –
more that she is preoccupied.
There are so many things to do.
Just living is hard enough, when you
have four children,
a drunken husband, and a clawing
hunger tearing you inside.
‘Yes, I know what it is she’s got.
The doctor told me. Not tomorrow,
not next week, but one day
ten years from now
the disease will flare inside her.’
She stops,
searching for words to say.
In a place loud with voices
this passes for silence.
Crows rasp, a conversation passed
from throat to throat
and back again.
Beyond the piece of tin
that serves as a door
a pot clatters, a bucket rattles,
a radio plays
songs of love and restlessness.
All this overlays
the sound of water spilled,
sudden squealing children bathing in the sun.
In this place, everything speaks.
The difficulty is, having spoken,
to be understood.
She lifts her hand
to make a leper’s claw.
Zarina looks on, curiously,
then turns away to watch
the other children play.
Six years old.
Still raw, but on the way
to meet her future:
ten years or more.
Not today.


29.Adam’s Daughter
Her eye is watchful, twisted
bird-like at me, her mouth
busy at the bread,
teeth frantic at the crust
as small animals
worrying the dread.
At three years old
she has seen enough
to live in dread.
Hands give and often take away.
There is no pattern to it.
The food is there and sometimes
disappears. Her mother’s hands
are often kind and suddenly rough,
knowing that the scraps she brings
will never be enough.
And women come
with heavy shoes where feet should be,
stirring up dust
as crows do, dangerously.
The street worms in upon us,
rubs against her spine.
Her mouth works busily,
but her mind is still,
waiting to see
what my next move would be.
Out of her eyes, I see myself,
crow black, vast,
blocking out the sun


30. Adam From New Zealand
Adam is a journalist,
newly arrived in India
at twenty-six, eager to seek/ and understand, 
and to record it all first-hand. 
So on his way into Bombay 
he has decided he must see 
the real India in Dharavi. 
How can I serve up Zarina 
or her brother Adam 
to their random cameras? 
they will smile shyly. 
The aperture will open 
to swallow up their souls. 
Their mother will send out for 
Thums Up, or 
from the stall at the corner of the lane, 
glasses of hot, sweet tea. 
She will put on a brave face, 
but everyone in Dharavi will know 
the world has 
come with cameras 
to make a side-show 
of her poverty. 
Adam, your namesake 
lives in Dharavi. 
But I will keep him out of reach 
of your greedy camera. 
He is too precious for you to see.”

Dharker, Imtiaz. “Adam from NewZealand.” Publication: Literature online; 
<http://www.worldcat.org/title/adam-from-new-zealand/oclc/316025014>

31. Nani
Nani the pregnant maid hanged herself 
In the privy one day. For three long hours
Until the police came, she was hanging there
A clumsy puppet, and when the wind blew
Turning her gently on the rope, it seemed
To us who were children then, that Nani
Was doing, to delight us, a comic
Dance.....The shrubs grew fast. Before the summer’s end,
The yellow flowers had hugged the doorway
and the walls. The privy, so abandoned,
Became an altar then, a lonely shrine
For a goddess who was dead. Another
Year or two, and, I asked my grandmother
One day, don’t you remember Nani, the dark
Plump one who bathed me near the well? Grandmother
Shifted the reading glasses on her nose
And stared at me. Nani, she asked, who is she?
With that question ended Nani. Each truth
Ends thus with a query. It is this designated
Deafness that turns mortality into
Immortality, the definite into
The soft indefinite. They are lucky
Who ask questions and move on before
The answers come, those wise ones who reside
In a blue silent zone, unscratched by doubts
For theirs is the clotted peace embedded
In life, like music in the Koel’s egg,
Like lust in the blood, or like the sap in a tree....


32. For Kinna II
But
He said:
Princess,
– and remember royalty are made not born –
it is not for lack of what you could have had.
Step up this way and see these valleys of green grass that the winds the rain and forever-sun have rooted so firmly, fanned up and levelled down as though it was a UN-proto farm. All that can, should, must be yours.
If I could drive the malaria from my bones, accept what I cannot accept, then lift up my gun and... shoot.
Here on either side of
the great precipice,
time has not begun to get
restless:
the winds are so still
I asked a toucan for a drink, and
he heard me!
Ah,
the land is truly beautiful.
The cattle are healthy,
their udders are full.
And they might even
smile – at milking.
Especially now that their
milk and their
meat go to
far away places to feed
mouths that are less
hungry than our own.
As happens to the potatoes
we till
so slowly
so painfully:
using
ancient implements,
hoeing and
brushing.
Baby,
it couldn’t have been
you that I
feared.
The noises
the praises
the blame:
and affection running as
thin as flax in the hands of a crippled dame,
and
my love
pawed by
rising expectations and
rocketing inflations,
just
couldn’t
fare
better than a fat mouse
before a lean cat.
They say
they mean
us all to
walk
swim and
fly?
What do we do, but
crawl into
corners and die
who were born without
legs
fins or
wings?
No, there are choices I
couldn’t face
even for
you,
My Little Queen

33. My Grandmother’s House
There is a house now far away where once
I received love.......That woman died,
The house withdrew into silence, snakes moved
Among books I was then too young
To read, and my blood turned cool like the moon
How often I think of going
There, to peer through blind eyes of windows or
Just listen to the frozen air,
Or in wild despair, pick an armful of
Darkness to bring it here to lie
Behind my bedroom door like a brooding
Dog.......you cannot believe, darling.
Can you, that I lived in such a house and
Was proud, and loved.......I who have lost
My way and beg now at strangers’ doors to
Receive love, at least in small change?

Das, Kamala. “My Grandmother’s House”. The Old Playhouse and Other Poems.

34. Point Shirley
From Water-Tower Hill to the brick prison
The shingle booms, bickering under
The sea's collapse.
Snowcakes break and welter. This year
The gritted wave leaps
The seawall and drops onto a bier
Of quahog chips,
Leaving a salty mash of ice to whiten
In my grandmother's sand yard. She is dead,
Whose laundry snapped and froze here, who
Kept house against
What the sluttish, rutted sea could do.
Squall waves once danced
Ship timbers in through the cellar window;
A thresh-tailed, lanced
Shark littered in the geranium bed ——
Such collusion of mulish elements
She wore her broom straws to the nub.
Twenty years out
Of her hand, the house still hugs in each drab
Stucco socket
The purple egg-stones: from Great Head's knob
To the filled-in Gut
The sea in its cold gizzard ground those rounds.
Nobody wintering now behind
The planked-up windows where she set
Her wheat loaves
And apple cakes to cool. What is it
Survives, grieves
So, battered, obstinate spit
Of gravel? The waves'
Spewed relics clicker masses in the wind,
Grey waves the stub-necked eiders ride.
A labor of love, and that labor lost.
Steadily the sea
Eats at Point Shirley. She died blessed,
And I come by
Bones, only bones, pawed and tossed,
A dog-faced sea.
The sun sinks under Boston, bloody red.
I would get from these dry-papped stones
The milk your love instilled in them.
The black ducks dive.
And though your graciousness might stream,
And I contrive,
Grandmother, stones are nothing of home
To that spumiest dove.
Against both bar and tower the black sea runs.

<http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/point-shirley/comments/>

35. Living Space
There are just not enough
straight lines. That
is the problem.
Nothing is flat
or parallel. Beams
balance crookedly on supports
thrust off the vertical.
Nails clutch at open seams.
The whole structure leans dangerously
towards the miraculous.
Into this rough frame,
someone has squeezed
a living space
and even dared to place
these eggs in a wire basket,
while fragile curves of white
hung out over the dark edge
of a slanted universe,
gathering the light
into themselves,
as if they were
the bright, thin walls of faith.

Dharker, Intia. “Living Space”. Postcards from god. Newcastle upon Tyne:
36. For a Child, Not Clever

Once you thought it good
you came fifty-sixth in class
out of fifty-six children.
But Mummy, you said,
fifty-six is bigger than one.
Voices crackle and break
around you. Why do you provoke
your sisters? Why do you never
tell us about your tests?
To me, the cousin who visits
sometimes, you say, as if
explaining things:
I’m not clever,
you see, that’s why these things
keep happening.
You pierced me with your pain
dunce dunce double d
Suddenly I see
how it is possible in Gethsemane
to say: I am the one you seek.
Let the rest go free.

De Souza, Eunice. “For a Child, Not Clever”. Nine Indian Women Poets – An

37. Testament

sing girl
sing
dere’s more to you
dan skin
my fingers witlow
from years of cleaning corners
where brush an dustpan
couldn’ reach
same han
use to plait yuh hair
wid pride
oil it thickness
wid hope an dreams
tie it up wid ribbons
of some rainbow future
mi apron was a canvas
all de greases
from rubbin down all yuh bodies
an cooking plenty greens
ah use to smell it
before ah roll it up
tek it to de laundry
smell de action a mi days
de sweat a mi action
mekking likkle time
fi yuh all
an yuh fadda
meeking time
fi a likkle formal prayer
to de heavens
fah dese days ah fine
every thought is a prayer
dat de pot won’t bwoil over
while ah pull myself upstairs
to scrub de bath
dat de cooker
won’t start play up
an de smell a gas
come leaking troo
dat someting teacha sey
would register
an yuh all could see a way
to stretch yuh brain
an move yuh han
pas idleness
to de honour a yuh work
ah can feel it
now yuh gettin older
steppin pas my likkle learning
dat yuh tink ah stupid
ah see how yuh fadda
embarrass yuh frens
wid im smell a oil
from de London trains
so yuh now stop bringing dem home
ah don’t talk to yuh much no more
outside de house
ah never did have time
to soun de soun
a de madda tongue
or mek mi way wid ease
troo dem drawing room
but in you goings girl
don’t mind we smell
we memories of back home
we regular Sunday church
in de back a de local hall
we is jus wat we is
watching you grow
into dis place
an ah want yuh to know
dis is yuh own
we done bleed fi it
yuh born here
in de shadow a Big Ben
im strike one
as de waters break
an yuh come rushing troo
ah do’t move far as yuh
is not mi duty to
an de cole does bad tings
to mi knee
I is ole tree girl
rough outside
wid years of breaking bark
feeling de damp
yuh is seed
burstin new groun
so sing girl
sing
dere’s more to you
dan skin
ah see yuh eye turn weh
anytime yuh see mi han
an at my age
ah really kean worry
who ah belch in front a
an if ah see someting good
in a skip
ah know it embarrass yuh
wen ah tek it out
but in dis place
dem trow weh nuff good tings
an waste is something
drill out me
from young
we had to save weself
from a shoestring
to a likkle lef over
an yuh know
how ah keep all yuh tongue sweet
wen ah tun mi han
to mek something special
out a nutten
ah nat trying to mek yuh feel sorry
believe me
ah just want yuh to understand
dat we come as far as we can
an we try to arm yuh
wid alld tings
dat in fi we small way
we could see dat yuh might need
ah nat telling yuh look roun
jus
sing girl sing
dere’s more to you
dan skin
yuh granmadda
was Nana
mountain strong
fighting pon er piece a lan
she plant er corn
one one
two two
a likkle pool a dirt
between hard cockpit stone
reap big ears
er grata was sharp
use to talk dry corn
to flour
needed for de trail
de long hard journey
carving out somewhere
jus like we come here
we done pay de dues
but don’t tink nobody
owe yuh nutten
jus stan yuh groun
is juh born lan
yuh navel string cut yah
so sing girl sing
dere’s more to you
dan skin


38. I Am Becoming My Mother
Yellow / brown woman
fingers smelling always of onions
My mother raises rare blooms
and waters them with tea
her birth waters sang like rivers
my mother is now me
My mother had a linen dress
the colour of the sky
and stored lace and damask
tablecloths
to pull shame out of her eye.
I am becoming my mother
brown / yellow woman
fingers smelling always of onions

Goodison, Lorna. “I am Becoming My Mother”. I am Becoming My Mother.