

Prelude and Seating of the Mothers

--Cindy E. King

You know your mother sucks
her Jesus fingers, probes your purse
for strands of tobacco, mother
of necessity and invention
who waits for you in the dark, dragging
on your step-father's Dunhills.
The mother whose body was bicep, a blood-knot,
belly tight, twisted like a budded
rose. Rattling mother who shook you,
the last of her children, "right the hell
from her body."

Forensic mother who dusts her baby
for prints, who pollinates the unfinished face
of her wallflower girl, powder
the shade of a pulverized Barbie.
Mother of the how-will-you-ever-find-a-husband,
of the press-on nails lost in the sofa like the scales
of tropical fish. Lipstick mother who rebuilds
the mouth, lost to too many lies. Shadow mother
who remakes her eyes in smoke, who gazes
at you like a bonfire. Mother of pearl,
envying the daughter of zirconia, who fights
then seek forgiveness at the makeup counter, where
another mother blackens her eyes, the Mary Kay mother,
foundation thick enough to keep thoughts
from surfacing on her face.

The mother who cries at your wedding but whose tears
return to their day jobs of wetting the eye. Mother who is plastered
like the walls of the kitchen, cracked and crazed,
who like the son of God is driven with nails, weighted
with rust-flecked skillets, scalps cut from cast iron heads.
Mother at home at the range in a cabbage rose apron
Mother of the heart-shaped meatloaf,
of lemon Pledge and broken promises.
The mother who pities the refrigerator light bulb
as it burns without end against the cold. Freezer mother
who begs you to kiss the blue from her lips.

Queen-of-the-night, your mother,
whose mouth is like rain blown sideways, who

when promised the moon, asks what she would do
with the bone of a butchered world.