

My mother taught me...

A poem for two voices and knitter

Catherine Jenkins

My mother taught me to knit.

Casting on:

She was self-taught, reflecting pictures into mirrors

form a slip knot one metre from yarn's end

translating dominant into left-handed gestures.

*place the slip knot on a needle and hold the needle in the right hand**with the yarn over your first finger*

She taught me to fear my emotions;

wind the loose end of the yarn around the left thumb from front to back

to hook my desires to the domestic

weave the needle through the newly formed stitch

to the financial

repeat to the desired number of stitches

if need be, to books.

My mother taught me to knit row after row of garter stitch

Row one: knit

sanctioning the creation of endless scarves with varying sizes of needles in varying colours

Row two: knit

sky blue and purple combinations

Row one: knit

awkwardly showing her backward right-handed daughter

Row two: knit

the slow travel of yarn across smooth metal.

Row one: knit

She taught me to lie;

Row two: knit

to speak partial truths when I knew my answer would offend

Row one: knit

when she was too reticent to voice her true question.

Row two: knit

When I tired of garter stitch
 Row one: knit
 envying her more accomplished patterns
 Row two: knit
 I asked her to teach me to purl
 Row one: knit
 she said, “no, keep knitting, keep practicing”
 Row two: knit
 I stopped knitting, bored.

My mother taught me that some men are only after one thing
 unaware that I’d already discovered what that one thing was.
 Trying to keep my face stern, I bit my lip hard.

At twenty-five, sick in bed, I cozied into knitting again;
 a simple sweater pattern beginning with a knit one purl one rib.
 Knit one; purl one
 I called my mother and again asked her to teach me to purl.
 Knit one; purl one
 She said, “you just knit the stitch backward—put the needle into the front of the stitch
 Knit one; purl one
 instead of the back—that’s all there is to it.” I learned to purl by phone.
 Knit one; purl one

My mother taught me perseverance, strength;
 Row one: knit; row two: purl
 by chance she taught me true forgiveness, resolution, absolution.
 Row one: knit; row two: purl
 Unsettled by the anniversary of her death, I engage with the needles again;
 Casting off:
 open the pattern book to find my name
 cast off in pattern
 written in my mother’s hand.
 cast off knit-wise on a knit row
 Mould a straight line into fabric, into pattern
 purl-wise on a purl row
 the logic, the mathematics, escape me.
 knit two stitches together, transfer the single stitch
 I see only the magic.
 then knit the next two stitches together



CATHERINE JENKINS is a PhD candidate in Communication and Culture, a joint program at Ryerson-York Universities in Toronto. Her research explores the impact of medical imaging technologies on patient-physician communication. She teaches Professional Communication at Ryerson. She is pleased to share the poem “My mother taught me...” in the current volume of *Feral Feminisms*. Previous publications include, “Aberrant Decoding: Dementia and the Collision of Television with Reality,” published in *The Intima: A Journal of Narrative Medicine* in Fall 2012; and the book chapter “Life Extension, Immortality and the Patient Voice,” recently published in *The Power of Death: Perceptions of Death in the Western World* (Oxford & New York: Berghahn Books, 2014). “The Message in Medical Imaging Media: An Analysis of GE Healthcare’s Vscan™” is a forthcoming chapter in the book, *Marshall McLuhan: The Mind, the Man, the Message* (University of Regina Press, 2015). She has published two books: *blood love & boomerangs* (poetry) and *Swimming in the Ocean* (fiction) and, once her dissertation is complete, she is looking forward to resuming work on a new novel.