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# The Meal

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## The Meal · Sharon Olds

Mama, I never stop seeing you there  
at the breakfast table when I'd come home from school—  
sitting with your excellent skeletal posture  
facing that plate with the one scoop of cottage cheese on it,  
forcing yourself to eat, though you did not want to live,  
feeding yourself, small spoonful by  
small spoonful, so you would not die and  
leave us without a mother as you were  
left without a mother. You'd sit  
in front of that mound rounded as a breast and  
giving off a cold moony light,  
light of the life you did not want, you would  
hold yourself there and stare down at it,  
an orphan forty years old staring at the breast,  
a freshly divorced woman down to 82 pounds  
staring at the cock runny with milk gone sour,  
a daughter who had always said  
the best thing her mother ever did for her  
was to die. I came home every day to  
find you there, dry-eyed, unbent, that  
hot control in the breakfast nook, your  
delicate savage bones over the cheese  
curdled like the breast of the mother twenty years in the  
porous earth,

and yet what I remember is your  
spoon moving like the cock moving in the  
body of the girl waking to the power of her pleasure,  
your spoon rising in courage, bite after bite, you  
tilted rigid over that plate until you  
polished it for my life.