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Four Poems · Sharon Olds

MY PARENTS' WEDDING NIGHT, 1937

I have never thought of that moment before
with any love, but today I suddenly
thought of that blood rippling out in a
rill the way the blood coams
out of the silver side of a fish when the knife's pressed down,
silver salty sweet fish of my
mother's sex. It was in the dark,
the harsh silk blinds drawn down, the
ruffled curtains unloosed at the waist and
flowing freely down into the room,
he touched her. She was naked for the first time,
the intricate embroidery silks of her
pudenda curly moist upright alert
terrified, thrilled, each thread
reaching out and curling back, she was
there in the dark in the bed like her own parents,
there at the center of the world. Now
she was the true loaf laid into the pan
raw and being fed now into the bright oven.
And my father leaning over her, his
ivory-white face and black hair, leaning
up on his elbows like a man pulling himself
up out of the ocean onto the beach,
entering her with his sex scarlet and
unbendable as red seaweed
until the sheet is like a heavy glossy
embroidered damask tablecloth
marked with spilled wine. The war had
not yet begun, they lay and slept in
blood and peace—no one knew yet what was coming.

I leave them wrapped in that stained sheet like a
double larvum in a speckled chrysalis,
they sleep with their mouths open like teenagers,
their breath sweet, the whole room smells
delicately of champagne and semen and blood.
I let them rest, but I go back again and again to that moment,
I watch them over and over until I get used to it,
like God watching Adam and Eve in the garden—
that first springing rill of dark blood,
I eye it the way the castaway stares at the
blackish life pouring out of the turtle's throat where he severs it.

THE PRESENT MOMENT

Every time my father gets worse
I forget what he was like before.
Now that he cannot sit up,
now that he just lies there
staring at the wall with the dark rich
mysterious liquid planet of his eye,
I forget the one who sat up in the light
and put on his silver reading glasses so the
light multiplied in the lenses.
Once he got to the hospital I
forgot the man who had lived at home,
lying on the gold couch with the pink
blanket around him, like a huge crushed bud,
the swimming pool just outside the door if he should
want to go down into the earth
in that blue water, water his servant,
air his servant, earth, fire, and I have
long forgotten the man who ate food,