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## My Mother's Fire

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“I know my fire,”  
says my mother  
In response to my grandmother's criticism  
Of her culinary prowess,  
And she speaks with such passion  
That for a moment I forget  
That she is referring to the  
Feeble, orange-blue flame  
That crowns her battered stovetop.

I stand, awestruck,  
My hands in the flour bin  
As I recognize the scorching, concentrated power  
Of those four, simple words.

It might have been a response  
To our overeager willingness  
To box her neatly into the kitchen  
And label the package “mother.”

The words might have been meant  
To take burning wings and swoop down  
Upon my grandmother's sharp tongue  
Or my father's glazed eyes  
Upon my own deafness,  
Upon the general grayness  
That has coloured the room  
Until this moment.

It might have been intended  
To scare us away  
From the few private spaces she inhabits,  
To burn the borders between us  
With bluish tongues of flame.

And in that instant  
My mother is no longer my mother.  
She has stripped down to her own naked fire.  
She is hollow, scorching eyes in an unfamiliar face  
She is covered with battle-scarred skin;  
She is someone I would not dare to name.

And then my vision is put out  
By the bubbling of the pot  
And the flour clumping  
In my sweating palms.  
I see her once more  
As the word “mother” has made her.

“I know my fire,” she repeats,  
Stirring the pot fiercely.  
The room recedes before her  
As her invisible flame blazes up to the ceiling  
And consumes the house.