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POETRY | FALL 2017

## She Waits

By Sheila Kelly

My mother waits for a bite or two  
and the hand to feed her and I am  
running late again, juggling a grocery list  
of cares too small to matter to her sick  
in bed. I bring no excuses, my arms  
full of People, the National Enquirer,  
her Blessed Be God prayer book.

Is this where we all end up someday,  
waiting for a bite of pressed turkey, withered  
gravy and peas, applesauce with an impossible-  
to-peel lid, white flour bun on a plastic plate,  
pat of butter softening?

My mother  
waits in hospital, her lips pursed, wordless,  
in a shape I read easily: she'll never ring  
for help when daughter will do, never  
yield to the broken strings of her musty heart,  
its irregular beats and clots, the crashes  
of its muffled hammers.

She waits for  
my hand, its steady music, antiphonal,  
full as a bell tone in cold air, yoked  
by a rope, a cast iron cup.

She waits, I swing unfree, move through  
an arc, round after round, my open  
mouth rings yes to her need, her failing  
heart, yes to her living, her dying, back  
and forth sounding, one tone only.

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Sheila Kelly writes poems and plays and leads generative writing workshops in libraries, community centers, art galleries, and most recently at the University of Pittsburgh's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. She is a retired psychotherapist and believes in the healing qualities of undefended speech that poetry invites and that making art is a birthright and not a luxury. Her work has been published in many journals and anthologies, most recently in *The Comstock Review*, *Paterson Literary Review* and *Pittsburgh Poetry Review*.

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