

The Book Handed Her

Anita Tanner

Wanting to be one of twelve princesses
to disappear down a trap door
underneath her bed each night
and dance to weariness in a haunted place

or to sit in the swing in the cottonwoods,
hear the rope crack
but keep going higher, higher
for the thrill of it,

but she remembers baths in an oblong, tin tub
brought in from a cellar house,
chairs encircling what she wished
were a silver throne,
towels carefully draped
so she could crouch behind.

Her first trip with her father
on his grocery run to the city,
the swift morning she had to dress
with him in the same hotel room.

The book handed her,
Being Born, she and Madge repulsed,
their drawn-out talks,
how they wished for another way,
couldn't imagine the neighbors
or their parents doing that.

When Gram pricked her finger
on the curtain stretchers
as she pulled from one end,
the red stain on white lace
became a revelation—Gram, too.

On long, lonely rides in the back seat
of the green Oldsmobile
she'd stare at each house
as if it were a dark cellar,
her thoughts a vacuous,
tight-lipped bedroom.

How it tasted—being a woman,
not her tongue on a cinnamon stick
but the first try of green olives,
red pimento stuffed inside.

ANITA TANNER resides in Colorado where she enjoys church work with teenagers, a local writer's group, tennis, four-wheeling, poetry writing, and reading. She is the mother of six including one missionary in New York City, wife of one, mother-in-law of two, and grandmother of Brittany.