

Washing Mother

Darlene Young

I return for the washing.
Can't resist your need,
Or else I want to atone
For leaving so eagerly
Without glancing back,
Back when you were whole and lively
And wanting to hold me tight.

You hold loosely now,
Mind moving on,
Body aching to follow.
I see the kind, huge effort you make to even
Hold at all, croaking out "Yes,
I'll miss you too—"
Graceful always, but looking over my shoulder
While you say it.

I wash your frail frame
Sallow and gaunt,
Holding only breath-whisper.
You're nearly gone,

Flitting above me or behind,
Dipping into other moments,
Reaching for shadows and ghosts,
Marking time.

You await without weight holy wholeness.
I watch and wait with you,
Holding my breath.

Soapy water's slippery
But I must take care
Not to hold too tightly,
For your paper-thin skin bruises easily
These days and your wet wrist
Slips silently from my hold.