

TWELVE

So, there you are, cross-legged, patient fingers
working tangles from the silky plume of the dog's tail,
mouth set in a stern love line exactly
like my grandmother's. You've already learned that love
is mostly duty: gathering worms after every rainfall, laying
countless broken birds to rest in tissue boxes,
grim as any village preacher. You've scabbed
knees, dirt rimmed nails – yet the new teacher's
eyes can't quite meet mine. Don't let all that beauty
confuse you: there will be a boy who does not
love you, then a man. And someday, a child
willful as a windborne spirit, slamming doors
and windows, raging like a storm at sea – raging,
but so far from you! - then curled in a sullen circle
of music, friends, secrets that exclude you.
And I'll be a photograph on the dresser,
a folded note beneath a stack of silken scarves—
maybe this note. So, listen, now, your mother is speaking:
Don't flinch in the face of all that angry beauty; breathe.
Know what it is to have love enough to squander.

- Anna Scotti