

Underwood

Jeanne Emmons

to my mother

1.

You used that old typewriter to transcribe
Daddy's dissertation. Later I swiped it
for college work. It had no power cord,
no web, no server, and no motherboard.
But it served me well to tell stories, or fake
the chance poem out of life's inevitable ache.

Its steel mass squatted on my desk,
and, jabbing with my fingers, I possessed
the keyboard, punctuated the work. The back
key took you back, did not delete. I lacked
erasable bond. So I'd ponder each shade
of thought. I went slow, each stroke weighed.

Looking back, I'm amazed at how driven
I was, as the dimming ink on the ribbon
faded to gray. How I loved the ding of the bell,
that told in the high soprano of its small knell
that the line was done, that it was time to slam
the carriage return to the right and start again.

2.

The carriage return has now suddenly brought
me to the margin stop of a blacker underwood,
with underbrush and dense trees. I thought
surely I'd find you down here, but I couldn't.
I tried to forget you then, but could not. Strange,
to have bathed in Lethe, day after day, unchanged.

Only the dead forget, Mother. As for me,
a twisted cord connects the umbilicus of grief
to memory's placenta. My helpless fingers
tremble. This is an Underwood of unease.
I am still looking for you. I still linger,
hoping somehow to find the margin release.

Let me step from Lethe's flood plain of loss
into the understory of myrtle and moss,
quaking aspen, dogwood, and wild plum,
grapevine, redbud, bittersweet. Let me come
at last into the underwood and through,
beneath a canopy of shadows, cypress and yew.