

Wedding Day

Belinda was in the kitchen with my mother
doing my mother's hair, as she often did.
She'd done mine, earlier, some weird concoction
that was a combination of high on my head
and hanging down in tufts, strands that flew
everywhere, but back then, I thought it was beautiful,
creative. Like Belinda, my much younger friend
who lived down the road and who'd become
so much part of our family, as if she'd been born into it.
I was in lilac chiffon, thin straps at the shoulders,
the rest of it floating around me. I was rushing
into the new life that my father's second marriage promised.
Later I'd be singing 'Perhaps Love' because 'Evergreen'
had proved too hard, though once it had been easy.
As I whizzed past, back and forth from bathroom to bedroom
attending to all the details – what I was wearing,
what I needed to take with me – I took in Belinda's face,
she couldn't have been more than twelve or thirteen,
yet her face held it in it her knowledge
of what my mother might be feeling, I saw in that split second
how there were things that were happening
that would be irrevocable. Belinda was silent,
my mother chattering away as if

it was another ordinary day. But then
as I bent down to give my mother a quick peck on the cheek,
goodbye! I could feel all my mother's sorrow,
the sorrow I'd already seen and turned away from
that was in Belinda's face: it was her compassion
that was terrible. I'd so long hardened against
my mother, didn't want to know about her feelings.
The last glimpse I had of my mother as I rushed out that door
was her sitting there at the kitchen table, that same kitchen
she'd thrown my father out of, her head bent over into her hands
as she cried. I saw Belinda standing there behind her,
stroking her back, her hair, saw her silence.
I didn't turn back but kept moving, so I could get out that door,
try – for the rest of my life – to leave her behind.