

on life and death and everything in between (woman)
by Brigid Regan McCarthy

I.

i saw two girls holding hands on the playground last week.
they were on the swings,
and holding hands on the swings is probably dangerous
and their mothers probably told them not to
but they did anyway.
i hope they hold hands forever,
even when their mothers tell them not to.
when they look at each other when they're fifteen and
r e a l i z e.
i hope they swell and marvel like it is a miracle they've found
(because it is).
i hope it's not a phase
(because it isn't).

II.

my mother holds the worry of a million things on her face,
traced like vacation itineraries and heavy half-smiles,
received from the children she bears.
yet she tells me that she would do it again,
if she were only younger and wealthier.
maybe if she drinks
more coffee?
maybe if she/we went to church more often?
she says
I won't understand
until

III.

i feel bizarre when i recognize
that all women look the same after eighty.
especially the white ones,
ashen faces and big hair and gleaming glasses and travelled skin.
usually their daughters hold their hands to guide them
to tables at italian restaurants and family brunches.
i see pain on their countenances, yet also glory.
such is life, i imagine.
i wonder when i will join their club. i hope i do.