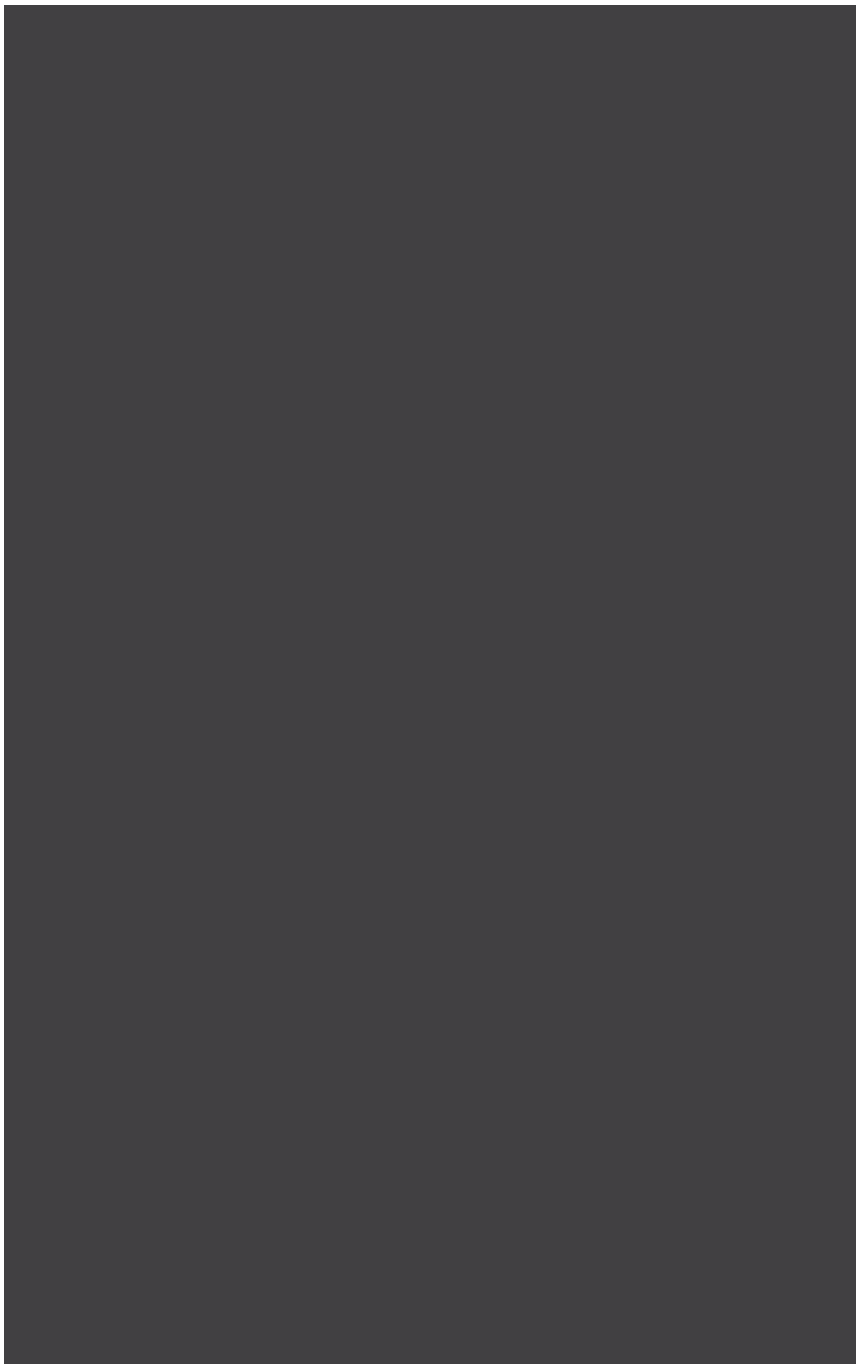


Mothers' Song



To measure is a human invention:
Measure things to compare -
Too slow, too small, too soft, too little -
Reducing you to nothing.

Also, to measure:
Intelligence,
Kindness,
Love.

And maybe your intelligence
Doesn't measure up to my love:
But maybe that sentence
Makes no sense:

Maybe
Making quizzes and questionnaires
With boxes to tick,
Placing us in safe
And defined - boxes -
Makes no sense.

And, what if
My too much too fast too loud too hard
too bold
Doesn't fit into the
"collective imagination" -
Which needs "balance" for survival.

How many of us conform
To this arbitrary balance?
So, fantasy worlds
Call out to us,
Universes on printed pages and on-screen,
Where stories have fewer limitations;
Where, immersed in the characters,
We travel their roads,
Sing their songs
And cry for their children.
And come back to this world
Watching ourselves in third person,
Like cardboard cut-outs.

Maybe this is what they call
The "impostor syndrome" -
Where all little victories are fake and
undeserved;

Or, is this “disassociation” -
Where pain is diminished
By removing the self from the equation.
Achieving balance
By making the self a zero.

But who has established the balance of
this scale,
So cruelly;
Who has shamed us into believing
That one must always land on the feet,
With poise,
Like a cat balancing in freefall.
But not all cats survive freefall -
This is just another perception,
Like the need for balance,
Like literal dictionary meanings
In which
A “father” is a male parent;
And “to father”
Simply means to become a male parent -
“To father a child”.

And
A “mother” is a female parent.

But, “to mother” is:
“To treat someone with great tenderness
and care,
To protect them from danger”
But even in dictionary meanings mothers
Have to walk a tightrope:
Balancing between
Loving their children unconditionally,
Always. Without exception.
Putting their needs first.
And
Not too much “mothering”
Mollycoddling. Being overprotective.

This doesn't sound real.
This needs to be off the scale.
While fathering is different,
As basic requirement,
That seems to be enough by itself -
To just father.
And don't you “whataboutgoodfathers”
me now.
This isn't their story.

Let's get back to mothers.

Who struggle at trying their best,
But are ashamed of failing,
Ashamed of “selfish thoughts”
Like hunger and sleep -
Yes, this is drilled into us:
Hating ourselves for feeling anything
other
Than what a mother “should” .

I want to attend
One work meeting,
A date, a girl’s night out -
Without guilt,
Without meals and homework
At the back of my head.
Instead, I have to balance.

Instead, I am made to feel validated
Only when
I have ticked all of these
Prefab, suffocating boxes -
And this should not be about
Ticking boxes.
Ticking boxes,
Like ticking clocks

That cannot stop -
To stop is a shame.

Shame!
A medal and a reward
For being mothers
The magical
Wind up key
That gets us going in the morning -
No, ticking in the morning!

Shame
For not feeling enough,
For feeling too much;
For being weak - too soft, incapable and
always falling short.
For being strong - ruthless, and not
motherly enough.

And Guilt - another badge of honor.
Guilt, for wanting things,
The guilt of not giving them enough,
Of giving them too much.
Shame and guilt -
Smokescreens. Tools

To rig the scale,
To keep the clock ticking,
To keep the balance going;

But anger, too is a ticking
Bomb.

It tips the balance.

It demands change.

A mother's infinite patience

Is, in reality, finite, like all resources.

That is why our own mother: nature

Is responding to our vandalism

With biblical floods and fires,

Reminding us of who she is.

And so our anger demands change

By reminding us where we came from

And how far we have come.

While it is never our destiny

To remember how we came into this

world,

Watching our entry with a foggy brain

Through the wrong end of the binoculars:

But we can remember how we have learnt
To latch on to it,
To seek footholds in its slopes,
To seek out tiny specs of sense,
To find heart, to find warmth
In the home fires we build, and tend to.
Fires that must be put out, so that new
ones may be lit.

Fires that we carry within ourselves,
That can burn down a house, a forest -
Or hammer and forge a chain mail -
A chain mail to protect
Our worth and our boundaries,
To keep us impervious
To scales
To tick-boxes
To archetypes.
Fetishised stories -
“Of” us:

A dutiful family woman, strong and stoic;
Virtuous, valiant mother,
An image of motherland;
A devout virgin, a priestess;

A wordless slave;
An infantile bimchette, a decoration;
Pygmalion's Galatea, a fantasy;
A witch, a madwoman - repeated insults;
Sometimes, an Angry Goddess - but never
without a husband;
Sometimes, a siren, a temptress, a whore.
Sometimes, even an Amazon.
But these are not our stories,
They are what the world has thrust upon
us.

And although we do not choose our
children,
Even when we think we do,
Even when we think we choose not to -
Even then,
We can choose the stories
That they inherit.

We will not allow them to weaken us
With the same taunts
As their fathers and aunts
And grandparents
Have used to shame us;

So that our daughters don't learn to say
sorry
For nothing.

We are tired of saying sorry.
Because we are not sorry
For refusing to listen to
Whether or not, and how
To mother,

We are not sorry for rejecting scales and
balance,
We are not sorry for not ticking boxes,
We are not sorry for not fitting into
stories.

We have set out to write our own, one for
one.
Exclusive. Not one size to fit all.
Today we are becoming our own
"mothers"
With our lenses and drums and chalks
With our voices and our bodies
With our love and our anger

With our “DIY” motherhood.
You are welcome to our fire.

We have burnt the scales;
And this time we are learning to balance
in flight,

Not in freefall.