

## MAXINE SILVERMAN

### *THE ONE STORY WE TELL*

When I finally locate Mother  
 among the old folks in the day room,  
 all soft in their chairs, when I stand over her,  
 mouth puckered and sunk,  
 bosom sprawled in her own lap, I kneel before her  
 and touch her arm. She brings her dull  
 her listing gaze to mine. At last, I think,  
 almost falling where I crouch,  
 here you are, helpless,  
 harmless.

Smack, smack to kingdom come, rattle  
 those three teeth in their gourd, spit  
 her maiming words back: no sport,  
 no sport in that. Besides,  
 I wrote that poem already, years before I knew  
 life would have its way with me, too.

Most of us have one story we tell. Oh, we might shine  
 its shoes, buy a snazzy book bag, new crayons,  
 but when you flip through the album, the same face  
 grins from the white grid, hopeful, more or less.

What I want is for someone to snatch me from the flames,  
 beat out the fire. When she holds me and I whimper  
*it hurts* she murmurs *I know, baby, I know.*

Someone did that once for me.  
 Helen held me with her singed brown hands  
 fifty years and more. Last Friday she died,  
 about 7 p.m. Her sister called to say  
 Helen wearied, that's all,  
 looked around—*here*  
*is a good enough place. This is far enough.*

Though the fire's ash and scars fade  
 my mother still knows who I am.  
 Look how she smiles.