

# High School Senior

by Sharon Olds

1 For seventeen years, her breath in the house  
at night, puff, puff, like summer  
cumulus above her bed,  
and her scalp smelling of apricots  
5 —this being who had formed within me,  
squatted like a bright tree-frog in the dark,  
like an eohippus<sup>1</sup> she had come out of history  
slowly, through me, into the daylight,  
I had the daily sight of her,  
10 like food or air she was there, like a mother.  
I say “college,” but I feel as if I cannot tell  
the difference between her leaving for college  
and our parting forever—I try to see  
this house without her, without her pure  
15 depth of feeling, without her creek-brown  
hair, her daedal<sup>2</sup> hands with their tapered  
fingers, her pupils dark as the mourning cloak’s  
wing,<sup>3</sup> but I can’t. Seventeen years  
ago, in this room, she moved inside me,  
20 I looked at the river, I could not imagine  
my life with her. I gazed across the street,  
and saw, in the icy winter sun,  
a column of steam rush up away from the earth.  
There are creatures whose children float away  
25 at birth, and those who throat-feed their young  
for weeks and never see them again. My daughter  
is free and she is in me—no, my love  
of her is in me, moving in my heart,  
changing chambers, like something poured  
30 from hand to hand, to be weighed and then reweighed.

<sup>1</sup> eohippus: *a small, extinct horse, an ancestor of the modern horse*

<sup>2</sup> daedal: *skillful; ingenious*

<sup>3</sup> mourning cloak’s wing: *the purplish brown wing of a type of butterfly*