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"Known To Be Left"

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Known To Be Left

SHARON OLDS

If I pass a mirror, I turn away,
I do not want to look at her,
and she does not want to be seen. Sometimes
I don't see how I'm going to go on doing this.
Often, when I feel that way,
within a few minutes I am crying, remembering
his body, or an area of it,
his backside often, a part of him
perfect to think of, luscious, not too
detailed, and his back turned to me.
After tears, the heart is less sore,
as if some goddess of humanness
within us has caressed us with a gush of tenderness.
I guess that's how people go on, without
knowing how. I am so ashamed
before my friends—to be known to be left
by the one who supposedly knew me best,
each hour is a room of shame, and I am
swimming, swimming, holding my head up,
smiling, joking, ashamed, ashamed,
like being naked with the clothed, or being
a child, having to try to behave
while hating the terms of your life. In me now
there's a being of sheer hate, like an angel
of hate. On the badminton lawn, she got
her one shot, pure as an arrow,
while through the eyelets of my blouse the no-see-ums
bit the flesh that no one else
cares to touch. In the mirror, the torso
looks like a pin-up hives martyr
or a cream pitcher speckled with henbit, pussy paws,
full of the milk of human kindness

and unkindness, and no one cares to drink.
 But look! I am starting to give him up!
 I believe he is not coming back. Something
 has died, inside me, believing that,
 like the death of a crone in one twin bed
 as a child is born in the other. Have faith,
 old heart. What is living, anyway,
 but dying.