

## **You Know, Mom, I Really Love You!**

When I recall the little boy who told me one day,  
“You know, I really love my mother,”  
I don’t think the idea popped into his mind all of a sudden.  
It was something that had been welling up in his heart for a long time,  
something he wanted to say.  
I remember he had cried in class.  
Not in front of everyone, of course!  
But all alone in his corner, he had cried  
because he didn’t understand what they were all talking about.  
Besides, at school, he rarely understands anything.  
How could he?  
In class, they never talk about the social worker  
who comes to see his mother and scares her.  
They never talk about the little girl next door  
who has been put in a foster home,  
or about the mother who insults her own mom  
because her children have been taken away from her.

“You know, I really love my mother,”  
he said, almost thinking out loud.  
But at school, why don’t they ever talk  
about waiting for “Welfare money,”  
or about the cops who are always in the housing project,  
or about all those people who can’t work  
because they are ill, like his father?  
At school, it’s like a postcard,  
everything is frozen, nothing ever moves.

Behind his hidden tears, why does he see his father’s face  
and his mother’s too?  
Maybe because earlier, on the playground,  
his classmates said,  
“Your brother’s a thief, isn’t he?”  
It’s true, seeing as his brother borrowed a car for fun.  
But why are his classmates so mean?  
Why do they make him feel ashamed of his clothes?

One child said, “I’m going away on holiday.”  
“My vacation will be terrific,” another boasted.  
“I’m going to the beach,” one said.  
“I’m going to camp,” another added.  
A little one clamored, “We’re going to my grandma’s.”  
He talked about the calves, and the horses, and the ducks...

At his seat, the boy thought,  
“It would be nice to go to the country.”  
He imagined the meadows and the trees.  
In his mind’s eye, the cows have to be blue.  
They should be painted blue!

Why does he imagine cows,  
cows the color of the sky,  
the color of his mother's eyes...?  
When he grows up, he will marry a girl  
who has big blue eyes.

The teacher breaks in on his dream  
with a question! And he hasn't been listening,  
he hasn't understood.  
So he ducks his head, not daring to look around,  
assuming that all the boys and girls in his class  
are shooting him down with their eyes that aren't blue...  
"Aren't you going to answer?" asks the teacher.  
He's ashamed, he can't talk. "Are you an idiot, or something?"  
How he hates school!  
School's where they never talk about blue cows.  
School's where he can't learn.  
School's where he is the stranger.  
School's where he is not at home, not in his street,  
not in his neighborhood.  
He is so unhappy that he wants to sink through the floor,  
run far away from this place.  
So often his father has said,  
"You're wasting your time at school, it won't do any good.  
They won't even teach you to read or write."  
And his father usually adds,  
"School didn't used to be like that.  
You used to learn things there..."

"That's funny," thinks the boy.  
"He doesn't know how to read or write either?  
Poor Dad! He can only sign his name, and Mom..."

"I really love you, Mom, you know!"  
She didn't learn much at school either.  
Sometimes, she says she never had the time to go...  
But Dad, why didn't he learn?  
So many questions! And he can't answer them...  
Flushed with shame, he sits down again.  
He takes his seat and imagines more blue cows.  
Blue cows for vacation, and blue grass,  
and the sky as blue as his mother's eyes.  
But holidays! What point is there in thinking about holidays?  
Isn't it because his mother told him,  
"There's no money, you're not going to camp,"  
that he thinks about holidays anyway?  
"I can't send everyone," his father said.  
"This year it will be the youngest ones' turn."  
So in his corner, lost, locked up in his world,  
he goes back to his dreams.

He imagines all his classmates leaving  
and he's all by himself in the street,  
no friends, no laughter, no meadows, no blue cows.  
He can hear them all laughing and singing.  
But what will he do?  
He'll get into trouble.  
They'll yell at him, he'll get beaten...  
Maybe the police will come, and the social worker too...  
Fear breaks over him--what if he gets placed in a home?  
Class is over, he breaks out and tears home.  
I can see him, flinging his arms around his surprised mother,  
calling out to her,  
"Mom, I really love you, you know!"

