

## "Hyacinth"

Basting the faces together, just to try this place  
on for size. Basting stitches. Basting in my own fat,  
that's what. The best place here's the coffee shop.  
All the pretty girls don't have kids at home,  
and the grey-haired, super-natural women scare me.  
They've thought about too much. It shows  
in their choice of shoes. My shoulder hurts –  
this bag's too heavy. In the registrar's office they  
told me *You've got all deficiencies!*  
No grade point average. No math. No science.  
No foreign language. No English composition.  
No employer's name. No spouse to speak of.

And no softness in my voice.  
That cuticle's bleeding again.  
They're polite, but no one has the slightest idea  
of the mess in the kitchen or the kid with bronchitis.  
What did she mean, *reentry woman!*  
I never had the chance to be here before.  
Women's work turned to the inside.  
Blind hems. Hidden seams. Who counts the stitches  
it takes to make a deficient life?  
One that doesn't fit anymore.

Mama left me grandma's gold thimble.  
Good women, daughters of farm women,  
raised in the church. At sixteen, grandma  
put up her hair and wore long skirts  
At sixteen, mama embroidered linens.  
At sixteen, I failed math and made that green dress.  
My farm's the window sill. By the time I was nineteen,  
I had a daughter, and a husband. There's been plenty  
of growing-up around me. *Deficiencies!* Maybe.  
But raising kids gives you persistence.

Last night, I heard the hyacinth crack its plastic pot.  
A root clawed through the green shell.  
No needle. No thimble. Just that thread.  
Ate a peep-hole, then let her rip – the coiled growth  
from inside straightening out, nosing into space.  
Tree roots heave paved roads.  
Seed leaves lift pebbles.

Morning-glory rises through cement step,  
baseboard, window frame.  
Climbs summer long inside the front hall.

*All deficiencies! Reentry!*

The force that drives a hyacinth root  
comes from the years it bloomed and sank.  
Just because you're vulnerable  
doesn't mean you're weak.  
Mama would push me into this, if she could.  
Perhaps that's reentry – generations  
packed into my head and heart,  
a full bulb, freshly planted.

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## About the Author

"Hyacinth" is from Jane Southwell Munro's third book of poems. Jane grew up, raised a family, worked at various jobs, and earned three graduate degrees in Vancouver. She has traveled widely in Europe and Asia, taught at UBC and Kwantlen University College, and now works for the Centre for Curriculum, Transfer & Technology where she is involved with this project. "Hyacinth" was commissioned for a book *Addressing the Needs of Returning Women* published by Jossey-Bass Inc., 1988. Jane was asked to "depict the peaks and valleys of the reentry woman's experience." Jane now lives with her husband in a house in the woods on the west coast of Vancouver Island.

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