

ELIZABETH STRAIGHT

## first of fourteen

“I came from what they *called* a broken home, but if they ever really called at our house, they would have known how wrong they were.”

Gil Scott Heron, *On Coming from a Broken Home*

She was the first of  
fourteen  
The oldest  
The example  
Mamma when her mamma died  
Using any and all means  
to keep Sunday morning mass routine  
Children fed and clean  
Disposition and diction pristine  
Full of grace Mother Mary  
Cuss you out Magdalene  
Straight hair yella Creole  
No lightening cream  
Coulda passed  
Never tried  
Rode to the back of the streetcar  
up and down St. Charles  
Grit in her glare  
Legs closed at the knees  
Every breath every bone  
All New Orleans  
Moved to Mississippi  
to Biloxi  
right there in between  
Gulfport and Ocean Springs  
Elliot's daughter  
married Turner Eugene  
had ten of her own  
babies then  
grandbabies started filling  
the home

And I was one of them  
Fortunate for the type of rearing  
I could never repay  
in a poem  
She is 79  
in the prime of her life

Son  
Husband  
Two brothers  
and a sister have died  
She still sits upright  
in the driver's seat  
Goes to daily mass and  
AA meetings  
YWCA for water aerobics  
Focused on living  
not on the pain that's been given  
Watches *Wheel of Fortune*  
Loves the Celtics and  
her Saints  
Alphonsus and Brees  
Don't bake no cookies  
She throws screamin'  
crabs in the  
gumbo pot  
with some bay leaves  
She cuts us with the truth  
Then slaps you on the back of the head with  
your own dumb-assness  
Teaching lessons you can't learn  
in no classes  
Always makes you laugh  
Feel privileged when it's your turn  
to rub her feet and  
her back  
The underpinning of everything  
of which I am proud  
Mamma when my mamma  
or my daddy wasn't around  
The oldest  
My example  
for shit talkin' and  
stature  
The bullshit butcher  
Pecan pie baker  
Christmas play costume maker  
Can't stand an excuse maker  
and can always spot a faker  
My soul could never hold all the  
sorrow she knows  
She was the oldest of fourteen  
She is my grandma June Rose