

Jennifer Wolfe

I Call My Mother Every Day

Mother

what do you do at night
when you want no food
when you have no books to read?
Crouching on the couch clutching your pipe
wrecking violence on the cat for no reason
and willing the phone not to ring
but I call, I always call

I love you

Mother

what do you do
while I am on the phone
telling you of this thing and of that thing
no one thing intersecting with your mind
smoking with short vicious puffs
pacing, carefully placing your foot
within each square of the checkerboard floor
willing me to hang up
and I do

but not before I tell you that I am fine
because what would you do if I weren't

Mother

what do you do
lying in your bed in the dark

lying to yourself
waiting for the daylight
for something to do.

Underneath the Wrapping

You tell me that I am a gift
you could unwrap for hours
and I smile
thinking of all the gifts I have
 received
and how long it took to open them.

You've given me all the easy ones,
ring boxes waiting to snap open,
candy boxes where the box
is the thing to keep
and the wrapping is on the inside,
flowers which don't even
come in boxes and later
have to be thrown away.

Your presents are easy to accept,
easy to forgive for not being
worth more than their price tags.

It wasn't always this simple,
I used to think a gift was
something I had to survive
or couldn't return
like the ability to be hit
and not cry out or the way
I can stand with my eyes squeezed
shut to make my words go away.

I don't have to worry
about these things anymore,
I can cry, scream, laugh.
I suppose that this is your gift.

For Erich Fromm

You've been saying lately about
how you love me, it's frightening,
you expect me to complete the
ritual. There are any number of
ways I can echo you but I can't
picture you old or imagine
ever giving up something I
wanted so you could be happy.

There is a failure of love. I
see you looking at me when you
think I'm not paying attention.
You look like you want to swallow
me, fit me inside of you and
keep me safe from drafts. I'm grateful
but that's not what you want to hear;
if you were a woman you would
be selling yourself for nothing.

This is all I have to offer
you: I think about you,
I think about you all the time.