

My Left Hand

Until this summer, my left hand
was my right hand's hero,
her big sister,
stepping in whenever
she was needed.

This was always true, the way it is
with most sets of hands-
She could always write clearer letters,
throw a ball farther, make a bigger muscle,
not a show-off thing, just the way it was.
They still worked together –
a sister-team
of trapeze artists, each with her own
bag of tricks, and the little one always held her own..
She could catch a ball falling from high
in the air, zip a zipper, turn a key, wave good-bye,
any thing she was asked.
Anything at all.

But over these last years,
because of a slow leak
In the brain,
the little sister has weakened,
losing strength and muscle,
and speed.

In the first year, she'd find herself
curling like a baby's hand
for no reason, and the arm
she depended on
stopped taking her for swinging rides.

In the second year, her skillful fingers
would stick on keyboard keys, pressing letters over and over,
as if glue stuck her, one finger at a time,
to letters she loved too much.
Her big sister, alarmed, learned to reach across
and pick up the extra work

with no complaints.
But she couldn't help when her little sister
couldn't beat a drum,
so that year, they both stopped drumming
with the little boy.

In the shower, the big sister
began to wash both sides of the head.
The little one tried the old familiar motion,
hard and rapid, up and down, the way she'd always moved, but it
seemed as if some heavy weight, a great tiredness, forbade her
for no reason.

In the third year, she was dropping things;
glasses, keys, (often on the dog's head as they tried
to return home from a walk,) whatever she might be holding.
Embarrassed, she often would not ask for help
turning the key, buttoning left to right, opening a bottle.
Her sister was doing plenty, she told herself.
Enough was enough, she'd say, she'd do it herself,
and with effort,
slowly, she would.

But now her sister's been told
it will begin to happen
to her. It said so
in a picture of a brain.

Who will help them both,
she wonders,
and how will they play catch
with the little boy?