

## Nepotism

Lengthening shadows signal another day's end.  
The work force slowly commutes through the city  
to their house, dog, and 2.4 children.

My frazzled brain rattles beneath my frazzled hair.  
Exhaustion seeps insidiously through my limbs,  
my nerves shot, my store of patience depleted.

My sister talks during the long drive ahead of us,  
her delightful chatter eliciting weak smile from my face,  
but my energy is too low to respond.

I enter her house and am greeted by  
the warbling voices of children—my nephews.

Although I love them, I am hesitant to be around them;  
my nerves so shot that I fear I will snap at them.

A credit to their youth, they are determined and persistent;  
they will not be denied their nightly entertainment.

So I allow myself to be carried by their energy,  
and we embark upon numerous adventures:  
checkers, coloring dancing, running.

I reach deep to muster the strength and my nephews  
selflessly supply it.

At 5 and 6, they radiate the innocence of childhood.  
Honest to a fault, they laugh when my hair is awry,  
call me a "pig" whenever I eat.

They have yet to become members of our cynical society,  
but see life through eyes that are yet unclouded  
by anger, jealousy, and manipulation—eyes that possess  
special force fields, allowing only happiness to enter.  
I am their auntie; to them, I am enormous, strong, invincible.

I can pick them up a thousand times, run a million miles.  
I dread the day when their penetrating gazes illuminate the true me:  
a weak person, full of faults and frailties.  
Therefore, I carry my current status tremulously,  
fearing the day when I lose the most prestigious gift I have received:  
the love and admiration of my nephews.

Their tiny fingers trace the outline of my medals.  
They think I am the fastest runner in the world.  
My nephews sport their new running shoes proudly.  
We race across fields together; the older on lean as a whippet and quick,  
his younger brother's stocky frame trudging steadily behind him.  
NO one has told them I am no longer so fast,  
that I am washed up, a has-been.  
I am grateful for this small gift of my nephew's unshakable confidence.

Both boys come racing down the stairs,  
their fire-red hair fragrant and freshly combed, still damp from their baths.  
We sit on the couch, I sandwiched between their warm bodies.  
I read a story using numerous animated voices for the characters.  
They chortle gleefully, ask questions with endearing lisps.  
Their milk and cookie-scented breath tickles my nose,  
as they snuggle closer to me, enraptured with the tale I am weaving.  
To me, this is happiness—the blessing of a child's love.-

-E.M.