Mothers

By Nikki Giovanni

the last time i was home
   to see my mother we kissed
   exchanged pleasantries
   and unpleasantries pulled a warm
   comforting silence around
   us and read separate books

i remember the first time
   i consciously saw her
   we were living in a three room
   apartment on burns avenue

mommy always sat in the dark
   i don’t know how i knew that but she did

that night i stumbled into the kitchen
   maybe because i’ve always been
   a night person or perhaps because i had wet
   the bed
   she was sitting on a chair
   the room was bathed in moonlight diffused through
   those thousands of panes landlords who rented
   to people with children were prone to put in windows
   she may have been smoking but maybe not
   her hair was three-quarters her height
   which made me a strong believer in the samson myth
   and very black

i’m sure i just hung there by the door
   i remember thinking: what a beautiful lady

she was very deliberately waiting
   perhaps for my father to come home
   from his night job or maybe for a dream
   that had promised to come by
   “come here” she said “i’ll teach you
   a poem: i see the moon
          the moon sees me
          god bless the moon
          and god bless me”

i taught it to my son
   who recited it for her
   just to say we must learn
   to bear the pleasures
   as we have borne the pains

