Lessons

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By Pete Karagianis

On a day not unlike today,
My mother taught me how to dance
In front of Wrigley Field
She said “move like this” and shook her hips
So I tried

She told me not to look both ways when I cross the street
“Cars don’t want to hit you”
Then showed me how to drive
“You’ll be fine”
Ever been in Chicago traffic, mom?
“Many times”
I had seen her receive the middle finger
on Lakeshore Drive

My mother taught me how to be sophisticated
Inside of the Art Museum
She put her finger up like this:
“Shhh! We’re inside!”

She told me to speak my mind even if my mouth was full
Then showed me how to cook,
Creating delicious smells
“Who needs forks, anyway?”
She dove in with her hands
And I, the innocent, tried to pull a fast one
“Don’t eat before it’s done”
“You’ll learn your lesson”

My mother taught me how to swear
In conversation, on the phone, in pain
The next day someone called me short
“Shit you!” I replied
She told me to follow what I thought was right
Then showed me how to think
“Keep an open mind”
“You’ll be fine”
But what if you just don’t know sometimes, mom?
“Well, improvise”
As I had seen her do
The master at work

My mother taught me how to love
Kneeling next to my father’s grave
She said “I miss you”
And I held her as she cried