

# When a Teacher Walks

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When a teacher walks  
into a classroom  
Her whole life walks with her  
She starts to speak

What can she teach you that a textbook won't, that a video won't, that a  
library won't, that Google won't

She was once the age of her students  
An age when she did not want to be a teacher  
Teachers are stagnant, always stared at  
She does not like to be stared at  
She likes it even less  
when eyes are not met

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What can she teach you that a newspaper won't, that study notes won't,  
that the internet won't, that traveling won't

Teachers are told to unpack a world  
Their own to stay folded  
Invisible

Because

Teachers cannot have pasts  
Teachers cannot be raped  
Teachers cannot have abortions  
Teachers cannot have lovers

Wait

Teachers surely cannot be having sex

Teachers, you see, cannot tell the truth

When you are a girl you don't think about being a teacher

When you are a girl

You think about being a boy

The grass feels safer on the other side

Is it?

When you are six and a woman touches you in a different way

Coaxes you to touch her

You know you have a sex

You know – you are a playground

When there is shame, there is no truth

When you are ten, you don't have a word for what happened

This folded part of your body has a word

So does that part of his body, different from you

And you -

You are Difference itself

At ten, a playground for an adult man

Sex - is a word

Rape - is a word

Not the act, but the words impale her

When she is Eleven

Sitting in a sex-education class by an old nun

Body named in fragments - and diagrams on the black board

This goes into that

And THAT is what had happened

To her

A word

resplendent in its brutality

Teachers teach words

But are words real?

Teachers were once young women

Desperately trying to earn the right to pleasure

Because

Pleasure has to be earned

Because

Pleasure is guilt

Because

You teach it, you learn it

There was a wound once

Now there is a scar

And Teachers cannot have scars

They call it group therapy at the NGO office

All wounded warriors talking in a circle on Saturday afternoons

This one woman never stops knitting, never looks up

Her husband, a doctor, was abusing their little girl

Their marriage is over

She has only one question for other survivors

Now, after all these years, are you *normal*?

Teachers have to be normal

Violence makes a baby, so does pleasure, so does indifference, so does suffering. Semen and egg make a baby

A baby

A childhood

Pure possibility

In a world of untruth

How can a teacher tell the truth?

Have you heard the sound of sadness dripping like an icicle?

Drip, drip, drip

The sound of sadness

inside a parent

drip, drip

You listen to it,

You and your parent

Like a chipped edge and its porcelain cup

Drip

One day the ground beneath your feet evaporates

Engulfs, drowns, tornadoes through your brain

You know it is time to go -

Lots of people die at 31

Before they become teachers

What can a teacher teach you that darkness won't, that bereavement won't,  
that rejection won't, that a sharp love won't

When a teacher walks

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Of boats leaning into good winds  
Of colours tricking through a prism  
Of desire in the shape of contentment  
Of belonging to a self

She learns of the line that traces back  
from the edge of each dark precipice  
The line of beauty, the line of hope, the line of persistence  
A line that says -  
If this is not what you want, where you want to be,  
Then take me where you will

Imagination alone redeems

Not the textbook, the data, the diagram, the capsule of information  
But their contours  
How thought makes ideas, how ideas make life  
You teach it, you learn it

Like being born  
on a chessboard -  
Someone said to her -  
Without knowing the rules -  
It takes a lifetime to figure the moves  
A lifetime to make them with grace and kindness

This is cognizance  
This is learning too

A teacher carries her chessboard

Tucked under her arms

At the classroom door, she hesitates ...

You see -

Listening comes before speaking

She cannot speak to filled chairs, pale walls, glazed eyes in a room

Only an ear can invite voice

Only learning can make room for teaching

With playfulness, with hunger, with luminous joy

With generosity, with honesty, with no decoy

No matter what she teaches

What matters is that

she can drape her voice

in her own skin

Take away the unfolding chessboard

And

Teachers are brains without bodies

Teachers are words without syntax

Strung between

A stray comma

an attentive apostrophe

a shy hyphen

a meditative bracket

a pensive exclamation

a bleeding semi-colon

Present - in every sense of the word -

Present, Porous, Translucent

We make our pact

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