

Waiting

by Adam Byatt

I

The kitchen tap dripped unceasingly and most of the cupboards hung at jaunty angles, but they would have to wait. Her friends were busy salivating over the latest celebrity cook book or pursuing the latest home renovation project. She didn't see the need in creating a mausoleum. For her there was always something else to do, something else that was a priority on a timetable that ran perpendicular to everyone else's. She saw no sense in waiting. Waiting was a weakness. Quickly she rinsed her bowl, spoon and mug before putting them on the dish rack to dry and heading out the door.

II

She sat in the car outside the school hall, listening to the ping of the engine cooling while waiting for her daughter to finish dance class. In her mind she compiled a list of all the things she had to do; all the things that made her wait: collect her son from sport, guess her husband's return time from work and sort the three foot high pile of washing. She glanced at her watch, wanting to hurry the time, and then watched the hall doors for a glimpse of pink tulle to come running.

"What are you waiting for, Mummy?" said the little ballerina as she scampered into the car while the engine sat silent.

"I don't know, darling, I don't know."

III

She picked up the silver-framed photograph of a woman nursing a newborn baby. She remembered the woman she was then and the intense possessiveness she had felt. Her arms formed a wall, protective and sheltering. It hid a selfishness that drank like the child at her breast; even wanting to withhold the child from its father.

“Flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone,” she murmured.

She waited for that sensation again as she packed the photograph into her luggage, waiting for the taxi, hoping the grit would become a pearl.

