

# With Ariel in Their Hands

by Alyson Jane

Sylvia Plath killed herself while her children slept upstairs,  
breakfast ready at their doors.

Anne Sexton wanted to do it, but Sylvia got there first, making  
Anne just a little less remarkable, although she tried often enough,  
her death like a song put on repeat.

Anne wrote about it later calling Sylvia a thief, stealing, how did  
she say? "Our boy." Suicide compared to a date for the prom. The  
high school quarterback.

A boy in my school killed himself. Jumped in front of a commuter  
train around 8AM. I, like all the other 7th grade girls who didn't  
know him, wore my most flattering black the next day. Did my best  
to convey emotion through black stockings and sweaters.

The boy in front of the train meant to do it, unlike Sylvia who they  
say was a little charlatan. Knew the maid would be coming over.  
Would be able to pluck her head out of the oven like a gooey half-  
baked tart.

Then the children could have opened their doors, found breakfast,  
brought it downstairs and told Mommy how silly she was to have left  
it there, getting cold on the thin wooden floor. But the maid didn't  
come.

They studied together you know. Anne and Sylvia. A poetry  
workshop with Robert Lowell. The man who wrote about  
graveyards. I can picture them together. Two girls talking about  
death like sex. The longing for it. The need. Suicide like  
masturbation.

Another girl in my school jumped off the George Washington  
Bridge, high on Ketamine—*special K*—or so it was said. I was a little  
older by then. Could begin to understand. Had begun to get an  
inkling for it myself.

In 1974 Anne finally decided on carbon monoxide poisoning. Over  
ten years after Sylvia had placed her head in that oven. But no one

remembers Anne's go round like they do Sylvia's. She was the first confessional. The first one to give us an idea of why. Specifics.

The boy who dove in front of the train could have gotten the idea from Sylvia. He could have read *The Bell Jar*. Sylvia's words egging him on. I'm sure she's done it for others. Thinking about their own deaths and taking a deep breath knowing that brilliant little woman did it. And Anne followed. All of them with Ariel in their hands, in their thoughts before making the final decision to walk into silence. Her legacy giving them strength. It's not so wrong, they'd think. Sylvia did it.

