

# Graduation (For My Mother)

by Sarah McKinstry-Brown

**There's the number on the scale that used to move  
with the ease of a feather in the breeze.**

**Not to mention the increase  
of young men behind grocery store registers**

**whose sweet, heavy-lidded eyes only meet with mine  
long enough to ask "Paper or plastic?" When they add**

**"Ma'am" without any hint of irony  
or Southern hospitality, I know I'm slipping**

**into my mother's skin. I answer the phone  
with her voice; her hands grind the coffee beans.**

**And who is this listening to NPR in the morning  
while the fresh-faced girls in the neighborhood trudge toward  
school,**

**peonies hanging their heads under the weight of their own  
blossoming.**

