**Memorial Day - A Sestina for Multiple Voices**

In my mother’s kitchen my aunts each begin to speak

about family achievements and God’s great mercy.

They hover over the wood table. They desire

to share hot casseroles wrapped in linen towels. With a spirit

of joy they cut into the fresh-baked apple pie. They sing

praises of their children and pass new photos to show a truth.

My aunt’s pastor brought her a truth

not pleasing to speak

about recent news from Minnesota. He’ll sing

praises about her daughter’s life. He’ll speak of God’s mercy.

My aunt’s spirit

becomes confused like an old woman’s diminished desire.

My daughter’s love was my only desire

but I need to know the truth.

Tell me again about her spirit

dashed by an unfaithful lover. I speak

about my daughter’s life that is over. Mercy

is about a dirge to sing.

Group your words into stanzas - make a poem sing

The indentation of lines can vary as you desire

Single words can occupy entire lines - like, “mercy”

You can break up your words into the shape of truth

Allow the shape to be the message you speak

Use unconventional punctuation as a path to the spirit

Near the body the two women felt no spirit

how could they sing

in this cold place? They couldn’t speak

of work, home, or desire

for new clothing to hang in closets or the truth

about unopened birthday cards and her need for mercy.

My aunt holds a photo and prays for mercy

She flicks away dust with a wipe of shattered spirit

This year it’s a more remote truth -

no picnics in my mother’s kitchen. No voices to sing

around a wood table. My mother’s only desire

is for visitors who come to speak

O, God! You are proved right as you speak. Grant me a willing spirit.

Have mercy on me, O, God! Let my tongue sing

on Memorial Day. Let me desire wisdom and innermost truth.

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