

# Maven

by Nikky Finney

## GENUS: DAUGHTER

*"When you are a thinking woman neither violence or sugar plums can muzzle the power of thought."*

Imagine, hatch, comprehend, apprehend:  
Know the inside and the out. You are just  
a girl when your mother dies. Left to tend  
the rest of the flock, you, the oldest,  
the one most like your father, taught  
to leave no stone unturned, marry thrift  
and industry, while burying your head  
in the stacks. Sang-froid but never  
silent. Inquire, picture, ponder, think  
over, think and think, again. Giddy  
with your own mind, "Master everything"  
is the family crest, no veil feigning, faking,  
guise, masquerade, or fanfare. There is  
a right way and a wrong. When you give  
your hand to the world, your responsibility:  
To have a mind, keep in mind, change  
a mind—and be the last to die.

## GENUS: SCHOLAR

*"An educated group is a thinking group."*

Intuit, divine, check and recheck, invent:  
Know the backward and the forward.  
You care nothing for the popular, even  
less for the slipshod. Your arms flower  
with all the leading out books, choosing  
wisely what and who trains you: Frankness,  
virtuoso, mastery, crackerjack. Think and  
think, again. You leave college and university  
exceptionally prepared. You are complex  
and astute, as calm as a comma. No time  
for jewelry or parlor beaux. There is  
a gold watch, a signet ring, a Smith  
College pin: White letters on gold just  
above the heart. Diligent, proficient, self-  
possessed, you weigh in with words, to state  
your tolerance to the inefficient. You never  
back down from what is right. Young Adelaide  
is your "dependable" and the 9th graders  
leaning in to your instruction whisper: This  
must be college. You gray beautifully—but early.

## GENUS: WRITER

*"The genius does not write to please."  
(nor live to marry)*

Veritas. Words pulled through a fine-tooth  
comb, then, before sleep, pulled through,  
again. You refuse to segregate language from

life, read German for sport and swing golf clubs just to stay on the qui vive. You write of the legality of taxes, pica out democracy, vow and edit for the intergral Negro intellectual. Winnow, probe, sift through, quest: Think and think, again. Solemnly engaged now to Lucretia & Thomas, you dislike being called "Dr." and remain forever keen on "Miss." What the dutiful trained hand can perfectly stitch delights you. Unconventional and easy-going, your desire never wanes: To be put through the paces, edify, enlighten, to work outward—from simple seam to monogram. We herald your bright hallmark of firsts, those sprightly high-waisted truths; the soft-spoken whippersnapper, eloping still.