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 beaus. 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.