

## MOMMA'S SAYINGS

"Momma had words for us:  
We were "crumb crushers,"  
"eating machines,"  
"bottomless pits."  
She made us charter members  
of the bonepickers' club,  
saying, "Just don't let your eyes get bigger  
than your stomachs."  
Saying, "Take all you want,  
but eat all you take."  
Saying, "I'm not made of money, you know,  
and the man at the Safeway  
don't give away groceries for free."

She trained us not to leave lights on  
"all over the house,"  
because "electricity costs money -  
so please turn the light off when you leave a room  
and take the white man's hand out of my pocket."

When we were small  
she called our feet "ant mashers,"  
but when we'd outgrow our shoes,  
our feet became "platforms."  
She told us we must be growing big feet  
to support some big heavyset women  
(like our grandma Tiddly).

When she had to buy us new underwear  
to replace the old ones full of holes,  
she'd swear we were growing razor blades in our behinds,  
"you tear these drawers up so fast."

Momma had words for us, alright:  
She called us "the wrecking crew."  
She said our untidy bedroom  
looked like "a cyclone struck it."

Our dirty fingernails she called "victory gardens."  
And when we'd come in from playing outside  
she'd tell us, "You smell like iron rust." She'd say,  
"Go take a bath  
and get some of that funk off of you."  
But when the water ran too long in the tub  
she'd yell "That's enough water to wash an elephant."  
And after the bath she'd say,  
"Be sure and grease those ashy legs."  
She'd lemon creme our elbows  
and pull the hot comb  
through "these touch kinks on your head."

Momma had lots of words for us,  
her never quite perfect daughters,  
the two brown pennies she wanted to polish  
so we'd shine like dimes."

Harryette Mullen