

I Go Back to May 1937

by Sharon Olds, Pulitzer Prize Winner

I see them standing at the formal gates of their colleges,
I see my father strolling out
under the ochre sandstone arch, the
red tiles glinting like bent
plates of blood behind his head, I
see my mother with a few light books at her hip
standing at the pillar made of tiny bricks,
the wrought-iron gate still open behind her, its
sword-tips aglow in the May air,
they are about to graduate, they are about to get married,
they are kids, they are dumb, all they know is they are
innocent, they would never hurt anybody.
I want to go up to them and say Stop,
don't do it—she's the wrong woman,
he's the wrong man, you are going to do things
you cannot imagine you would ever do,
you are going to do bad things to children,
you are going to suffer in ways you have not heard of,
you are going to want to die. I want to go
up to them there in the late May sunlight and say it,
her hungry pretty face turning to me,
her pitiful beautiful untouched body,
his arrogant handsome face turning to me,
his pitiful beautiful untouched body,
but I don't do it. I want to live. I
take them up like the male and female
paper dolls and bang them together
at the hips, like chips of flint, as if to
strike sparks from them, I say
Do what you are going to do, and I will tell about it.

Listen to it, read by the poet, here: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/176442>

Sharon Olds, "I Go Back to May 1937" from Strike Sparks: Selected Poems 1980-2002. Copyright © 2004 by Sharon Olds. Reprinted with the permission of Alfred A. Knopf, a division of Random House, Inc. Source: Strike Sparks: Selected Poems 1980-2002 (Alfred A. Knopf, 2004)