

POOR GIRL'S BARBIE

I dressed my doll in rags,
squares of black corduroy
fastened with giant blue stitches,
holes scissored out for the arms,
a pink cotton wrap-around skirt,
a snippet of net on her hair.

Though her legs didn't bend,
she would dance like a dervish,
eyelids blinking like shutters,
cheeks smudged with dirt,
two fingers missing from when
my little brother kidnapped her.

Hinged at shoulders and hips,
she had breasts but no nipples,
no vulva, no hair down below,
just hard pink skin over which
her handmade dresses slipped
when she danced on her high-heeled toes.

She slept in a shoe box
on top of her tiny clothes,
wearing a flowered nightgown
made from an old flannel sleeve,
tiny gold teddy bear under her arm
so she wouldn't be scared in the dark.

Fifty years later, I open the box.
There she lies with her teddy bear,
one arm up and one arm down,
eyes closed to the smell of age and rot.
Should I dress her and make her dance again
or close the lid and let her sleep?

Poor Girl's Barbie, plus 4--2

BEAUTY CONFESSES

I'm the girl who dates the trolls,
the beauty who loves the beast,
the lamb who calms the bear.

Is it the glasses, the unpainted nails,
the tendency for pudgy thighs
or the broom that's always in my hands?

Was it the dad who wouldn't let me date
till all the artists and jocks were taken,
nothing left but the awkward ones?

I've dated the fat, the freaky,
the ones with bad teeth and breath,
the ones who couldn't get it up.

I've been with the drunks, the druggies,
the paranoid and the cruel,
devils and men who prayed all day.

Only once, I had a prince.
Oh, how we danced, how we loved,
spinning in each other's arms.

But the clock struck twelve, and he was gone.
I'm back in the woods with another troll,
a beast who says I'm beautiful.

No one has ever loved this beast.
I'll stroke his fur, pat his ample belly
and slowly teach him how to dance.

UNLUCKY PURPLE BLAZER STRIKES AGAIN

Help! My pantyhose are falling down.
Under the jacket, under the skirt, under the slip,
I can feel the waistband oozing south.
Please God, let it stop at my hipbone.
I need just one good upward tug,
but I can't in front of the whole damned church.

If I just sit, it won't move more,
but you know Catholics, sit, stand, kneel.
Okay. Reach in, grab some elastic, pull.
No, they're still coming down. I have to sneeze.
I can't reach my handkerchief, both hands
busy playing the "Lamb of God."

Sweet Lord, it's down to my navel now.
I pooch out my gut just to hold it there.
I almost overslept today. I thought
it was time to change the clock, but no,
at 3 a.m. I looked it up, discovered
it was 4. Fall back next Saturday, it said.

Oh God! It just slipped below my belly,
and now we've got to stand. Let us pray
sitting down for heaven's sake. I reach my hand
between skirt and coat, yank it hard this time.
I think I pulled my underwear.
I need to tie these things around my neck.

Father just gave me a look.
He knows not what I'm going through
here at the grand piano.
Jesus never messed with pantyhose,
nor did the old male organists.
No heels, no hats, no skirts, no slips.
Next week I'm going back to slacks.

Poor Girl's Barbie, plus 4--4

NEXT STOP: CONVENT

At 22, I was married
to a skinny man
with brown hair,
glasses,
a liking for booze,
cigarettes, and ass
and a disliking,
apparently, for me.
The church said
it didn't count
because
he didn't want kids,
and being Catholic,
you have to want kids
or never
have sex.

At 29, I was not married
to a chubby man
with curly blond hair,
glasses,
and a liking for Coke,
cruelty, and ass.
Yes he liked me
and he wanted kids,
but he wasn't quite
divorced, so,
me being Catholic,
I drove away,
alone,
just bruised
thank God.

At 33, I married again,
to a burly man
with brown hair,
glasses,
three kids,
and a liking for booze
and jazz, ass not so much.

[continued]

Poor Girl's Barbie, plus 4--5

[Next Stop: Convent, continued]

But he loved me,
and he was kind,
also Protestant
and divorced,

so the church said
it didn't count,
our wedding
by a pond
with geese
in the sun.
But anyway,
he died.

At 63, I live alone
with my yellow dog,
blonde hair, no glasses,
a liking for Milk-bones,
belly rubs and grass.
We're both single.
The church
approves,
believes in fact,
I've never wed,
never loved,
never shared
a bed
with a brown-haired man
who liked booze,
cigarettes
or ass,
never rose
naked
and pleasantly sore
with a hickey
on my neck.
But who am I
to argue
with God?

Poor Girl's Barbie, plus 4--6

IN THE GARDEN WITH JESUS

We're all sitting in the chapel.
Was it foggy that night?
No, it's the incense wafting
from a bowl on a chain
(One year it set off the smoke alarm).

We're supposed to be quiet now,
praying in the garden with Jesus.
The apostles all fell asleep.
I'm thinking if women were there,
we would have stayed awake.

Women would have wept with Him,
hugged Him and wiped his bloody sweat.
Maybe they were stuck in the upper room
doing the dishes and cleaning up,
not even invited to the garden.

Just focus on the crucifix.
As the smoke begins to clear
parishioners are sneaking out,
keys rattling, zippers zipping,
rain pattering on the roof.

I try to feel the nails shoved
through my fleshy hands and feet,
but Lord, I'm weak. My earrings hurt.
I would have screamed, "Bring me down!
You're right. I am not God.

Just let me be a carpenter."
I'm Mary watching blood drip on the dirt.
I'm Peter. "I don't know the man."
I'm all those guys who ran away.
I'm Thomas who didn't quite believe.

So, Jesus on the cross.
Did he really wear a loincloth?
Did his toenails need a trim?
Is that a scar or a nick in the wood?
What color really was his skin?

(more)

Poor Girl's Barbie, plus 4--7

(In the Garden with Jesus, cont'd.)

Next to me, a Spanish man
sits erect, his eyes closed tight.
A woman kneels by the cross.
Lovely figure, snug-fit jeans.
Oh God, my mind, my mind.

Concentrate. Holy Thursday.
Jesus, God made man. Washed feet,
gave bread, prayed till Judas came,
died hard and rose again. Amen.
My stomach rumbles. Hungry.

Silence so deep it quivers.
White candles flickering.
Jesus up there, waiting
for me to hear his voice.
I shut my eyes. I try.