

Scandal

Rage, you fill my rooms
like a nosy aunt
taking up space
with large hips
and sharp tongue.
I think you a nuisance

until I notice you
are on a war-path
purging my house
of all the silly doilies,
niceties that keep me docile.
You are not what you seem!
Wide-eyed I run after
what you've discarded as trash,
stuff my closets when your back is turned.
You are making such a ruckus
murdering off my petticoats!
What will the neighbors think?
Frantic, I bake polite cookies
to cover the stench of carnage—
my pretty things
now white-faced corpses
my darling hats
rotting into skulls.
Good god, what would the church ladies say
if they stopped for tea, just now?
I run behind you with a mop
but it is no use.
It's all a wreck.
Even the one box of bones
I knew I had
hidden in the attic corner
you've placed on the mantle
like an arrangement of trophies.

I try to sweet talk you into being calm.
You tell me in clear terms,
this is no time for calm.
"I AM ALWAYS CALM!"
I shout with irony.
"Why do you think I came?"
you whisper with mischief.

I hate you and love you and need you
all at the same time.
Where did you even come from?!
You cackle. You came from
the backyard, where I buried you.
I gasp. I blush. I did no such thing!
But in the recesses of my memory,
I can feel the weight of your large body
as I hauled you in the secret night
and dug a grave,
then washed my hands and
served up scones in the morning.
Good Lord! In shock I stare down at my hands,
as if seeing them for the first time.
"I forgive you," you say.
I look into your blood-red eyes unashamedly,
"Welcome back," I say.

Lot's Wife

I want to charge into the new,
to feel the breeze on my face
and not look back,
but my legs, like pillars of salt,
hold me to the evil.
I am planted to it,
like reverse roots;
Sodom drains my life-blood away,
and though my children are ahead of me
and I know I've saved them
by coming this far,
I feel tied up by the ankles,
unable to let go, I am stiffening.
I taste salt, like rising bile,
in the back of my throat.
Why would I return
to the men who would plunder my guests
and rape my daughters?
Why would I listen to their voices
calling me back, promising comfort,
saying, *This is your home?*

My eyes scan ahead, into the unknown
and I am terrified by what I do not know.

At least the pain and abuse is familiar territory
and I know how to be in it.
This new life will require a me
that I don't know if I have anymore.
I look into my daughter's faces and I see
that they have it still—
a fire I somehow passed on
though it lay dormant in me. They will survive,
I know, and of this, I am proud.
But the pride in me is small
and sour and hunched over
and the monsters of my past are calling
me back, back to my smallness
and smallness is easier than growing.
I am too tired to grow.

Oh that I might die in my grief,
rather than return to my torment!
Might God have mercy on my weak soul?
Tears stream down my wrinkled face.
I lick them from my lips.
They taste of salt.
I cannot go on.
I will not go back.
I will not die.
God, forgive me!
I will become a monument,
one solitary life-sized tear
for every daughter who did not
or could not
or would not
leave.