

Happy Woman Blues

We get it too, we get it bad,
we get bitten by it, we get “but, but—”

we get downlow, we drone dismal
ditties to an empty kitchen,

we get our gittyup back
then lose it on the drive home.

We know we got it in us, this pus, this
moist doom room with a doorknob

of teeth; we know we get it
from the moon, from the extinctions

all-around-us gloom, from the loony
skeeves who creep us out, bring us

low as fruit too ripe to eat.
We know it can be a monthly woe,

or seasonal, we know it’s both
reasonable *and* unreasonable—

we know all about ourselves—and yet—
we rarely pause to give ourselves

a breath, we blast straight into the blues
like astronauts who’d never think to snooze,

who stay awake and scan the stars
for the hottest proof of whose to blame.

We know the elements that go into it—
we can spit and spit but still,

no pit will take the blame in full,
no matter how hard we suck and pull.

Mostly we can take the heat but sometimes
what we need is meat to burn—

something dead and edible we can slice
into morsels with a kitchen knife

something that will feed us iron, heal a bruise—
cuz we get punched, we get black-and-blue.

On a Wednesday

In the space between
getting one thing done
& getting something else done
I get undone
by you.

Time Capsule

I buried my childhood in a box.
“Don’t ruin my lawn!” my friend’s father

growled, so we dug into grass
whose wound nobody would notice

in the sliver of space between the garage
and the neighbor’s fence.

In one afternoon, we packed the whole of our hearts
into that box. Every thing we loved.

Every person, too: the crushes,
and our code names for them.

The notes we wrote each other at home
in our twin beds, the candy from our lockers,

a little something stolen from a younger sibling.
We wrapped the box in every bag

from her mother’s kitchen drawer,
tied each bag into a knot, placed the package

solemnly against the open earth.
When we dug it up years later—

the day after our ceremony of green gowns,
our hair still wild from a party in the woods—

all we found was faded bits of plastic.
Our wants weren’t timeless

but their wrappers remained.
Years later again, my friend has a child

I do not know. I have a child
she’s never met. But what we wrapped

each other in—for all those years,
all those years ago—remains.

Not That Sort Of Woman

"Mouths don't empty themselves unless the ears are sympathetic and knowing."

— Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men*

I thought I could love you, sink in among couch pillows
as you whisked batter in a Pyrex bowl, tickle your child,
delight in the clothes slathered gorgeous on your body,
the dusklight angling in yet blinding no one, not even
the cat licking his paws on the armchair's arm.

I thought I'd eat your pies, offer you my old clothes,
that we'd stain our fingers together weeding beets
or gathering currants. I'd give you bouquets of thyme
and sage with a little ribbon, you'd drop off a portion
of your final batch of butter as the summer drizzled
its last beads of sweat into air made chilly
by the dying leaves. You'd drive us places at night
where there was wine and women we didn't know,
where there was music for us to dance to,
our braids loosening from the way we threw our bodies
side to side, laughing even when we spilled our drinks,
laughing at our calloused feet, our filthy toenails.

I was prepared to know your mother and your mother's
way of convincing you to rest; I'd have given up acres
of my Sundays to help you card your wool or cut squares
of fabric on the bedroom floor. But there was none of that—
no yelling flower names across a field, no spitting cherry pits
into a hissing fire, no jokes whose inception has been lost,
no loaning you my favorite sweater, no the two of us
asleep in your bed on a husbandless night, you woken
at dawn by the rooster, I sleeping through his howl.

Call to Prayer

I feed him facing east
through the phases of night

A cry, not a bell
tells me it's time

In the day, I'm mistaken
for other people—

The ones who spend their nights
asleep in their beds

The ones untethered
by this pulsing thread

That leads to a red-lit room
where night and day are null

Where there is only the cry
or the silence of being fed

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Behold: I've become
a priestess of milk

My body, bold as a boulder
performs the ordinary miracle

Of turning blood into food
of witnessing night

Turn to night
turn to dawn

Unwilling pilgrim, I rise
from the warmth of sleep

To unwrap, and feed,
and change, and swaddle

Mocked by the clock
and its forward information

Watched only by the moon
in all of her phases

*

This was all foretold to me
Yet how could I know (before I knew)

How long one night could stretch
how the waterlines of my brain

Would be crushed by a truck
and mended, dripping

Their salty insides
along the frayed hems of days

How I would feed myself
any bit of cold food at any hour,

And how two bodies could meet
in all directions