

Party for one



(and OTHER THOUGHTS ON
SELF, ROLES, and CONNECTION)

Bernie at the Inauguration

It began when the original sighed into your texts,
Those mittened hands crossed campfire logs,
Even his mask is underdressed!
lone folding chair like a groupie first to the show

Then, before the manilla debates settled
(confidential briefing or early tax returns?!)
like a wayward noun gone wild,
that cold curmudgeon turned mad lib.

We traded Bernies inserted absurdly.
Here, glaring from the mean girls' table,
missing the memo that on Wednesdays,
we wear pink.

Here, sneering at Forest's offer of chocolates!
Here, reigning from an iron throne!
A craving for levity bubbled in all of us,
crisp and furious as champagne.

No, not a mad lib.
He turned Rorschach,
ink on a blank page.
We all wanted to coax out a confession.

Once, your dad took your brother fishing solo.
You woke late and over blueberry pancakes
with your mom, she mentioned
they'd be gone until noon.

Now, looking at those memes,
you see your mouth,
that blue-stained seam,
wondering why he is loved the most.

Maybe we all see ourselves,
scrappy or sulky or sincere,
arms crossed in our party for one,
but still here.

Writers Group

She brought her poem in for a check up,
lifted it gently on to the papered examining table
sat quietly while we raised our stethoscopes, listened to its heart.

A sure beat resounded like a kettledrum,
a strong pulse for such a little thing
but when we poked and prodded, it yelped.

We x-rayed and biopsied every line, searched for root causes.
Why the violent shifts in points of view?
Is that the mother or sister humming in stanza 4?

Nice imagery, with that “dishrag of a woman”,
but we concurred it suffered from predictability
The narrative smelling of lemon, all hospital spic and span

“What could that mean?” one of us gasped
when we tested the poem’s reflexes,
and it did not kick back.

We understood later, of course, after the autopsy
after the coroner had incised
and emptied the contents of its stomach.

Hunger Strike

After Sonia Sanchez

Day three of his stand
tiny fists of rage and milk
Mashed peas in the rug

No graham crackers here
Therefore, he hates everyone
It is just a phase

All the mom blogs say
Control or texture issues
Have you tried this or...

that advice rattles
while I cut meat into stars
choo choo spoons

to his howling mouth
I feel myself unfurling,
the symbiotic

slink of a tapeworm
as if my coiled existence
relies on him eating

a bite of apple.
How have I unlearned so much
from the newborn days?

That fevers will break?
That my worry is a sheath?
That he won't languish?

Once, I kissed a man
under a thundering sky-
thought, "This is a love

worth dying for." And
motherhood? A tourniquet-
It's a love that grips.

Bounty Hunter

Shameful moments sun themselves below my brain's equator-
hiding from their atrocities like war criminals in Argentina.

See a girl in a cheap one piece, translucent when wet,
arms crossed, breath held while chlorinated boys jeer.

A romantic is in her bunker, wrapped in apologies
that his sheets stayed virginal white, despite breached hymn and hymen

The most notorious recoils in a champagne fog.
Postpartum hair wilted like June tulips,

I should just shave it off- start fresh! I chatter to the stylist
There's my sister tilting her veiled head- eyebrows in all caps.

There are more, of course, crouching in cubbies,
as if to disappear when the door is inevitably kicked in.

One bare Tuesday, pressed against my husband's coat,
he wished for a hat. *"Not much hair to keep me warm anymore!"*

You should have seen how my brain leapt,
extradited my comment tossed to the bubblegum woman.

Didn't you guess all that pink covered raw scalp?
The interrogation light blinding,

And my husband, he thought it was a forbidding gust
that caused me to flinch.

Melt

I know it's cliché to say
I melted when he kissed me,
but I swear I did.

Plink of lips,
pockets of breath,
thrum of rain,
and when he pressed
my back against the door,
I slipped right through
the porch floorboards-
one of Dali's clocks-
dripped into the river
where all temporary things whorl,
tumbled through rapids,
pull of the undercurrent-
gasp for-
a taste of earth, salt
rush of air
clawed up on land,
spent.

Ten years later,
we use marital shorthand
Pizza tonight? ETA?
and we sleep back to back,
on account of his snoring.
Last night, he chased the nightmares
from our youngest's closet,
kissed that little forehead
despite protests about
his beard's scratchiness.