

Net Worth

I told him my dad was a janitor.
I answered all the other questions honestly.
I told him I'd work really hard, and he wouldn't be sorry.

*My father climbed out of an angry mother and no education
and became a millionaire household word. I just floated gently
into the cradle of unearned ease, rocking in the breeze on quicksand.*

It was my first job and I loved it. I created burgers and fries.
I dip-swooped the curlicues at the tops of the ice cream cones.
I even played the cash register.

*We always dressed for dinner. A slender candle
lit each place setting. My mother rang a silver bell
whenever we were ready for the next course.*

I loved pulling my weight.
I got there early and left late.
But I only lasted one paycheck.

The manager found out my real name. "Someone
who really needs this job should have it. And you have to admit,"
he said as I looked away, "you don't really need this job."

If you start with nothing and you do something,
it really happened.
It's yours.

If you start with money and you do something,
the money gets the credit, so
it's never really yours.

He had no idea how much
I wanted to be poor

so I could be worth something.

Rent Control

Without knowing how to tie my shoes,
before I was tall enough to ride the ride,
I crept into the shadows barefoot,
and found a hiding place.

From there, I blazed a brazen trail,
all swagger and risk, hard laughter and
long brown cigarettes. Men and women
found my bed. But no one found
my hiding place.

I learned to bodysurf in the rough waters
of Laguna Beach.
I wolfed down breakfasts after all-nighters in clubs
in Manhattan.
I sipped espressos and gossiped with my friends
in Florence.
I didn't know what my heart was for,
but I knew how to look like I did,
so no one even dreamed
there was a hiding place.

It's thirty years later and
I still live here.
People think I'm nuts,
but

it's rent controlled.

So I really
can't afford
to give it up.

Maurizio

Maurizio was his name. I read it off his meter, the ordinary, bland-looking driver who picks me up at the train station in Florence.

Asking, "Where to?" he's not ready for the answer. "I don't know," I said. "I'm just aiming to get into some good trouble." He

understands, (he wants to hope), but he's not sure he understands. At the red light he looks in his rearview mirror, undressing me as I smoke a small curved cherry tobacco pipe.

Risk has never been so delicious. He asks, "What kind of trouble?" Reflected eye contact slithers down into my thighs. "*That* trouble," he says, reaching a little, I think, "could just as well be me, no?"

I enjoy letting him wait. I suck on my little pipe, lean my head back, incendiary and amused. I love my Jōvan/cherry tobacco/woman-in-heat scent. It's wafting past his meter curling into his nose from the back seat. I feel

zero hesitation. We get a room. He is tender, confident, has brilliant timing. The zenith of rapture teases us, crouching behind each surge till it undoes us at our limits. Zinging fireflies of desire electrify my nerve endings even after we finish. I want more.

I get more. But I never tell him my name. We make love for hours. And I don't tell him. At first, it's just fun to make him tease me for it. But then, this incredible space shows up in my belly, full of. . .My Name.

Oh, the precious power of belonging to myself, the liberation that comes from opening my inmost hungerfeast to him, but not ever, not even after saying goodbye, offering my name.

I'm Trying to Find Her

"I don't know where I am," she said in a panic
from her snappy little Mercedes in Reno. I was in Seattle.
Her dementia could have led her anywhere.

She's been dead twenty years now.
Where is she in me?
I can't find her anywhere.

At sixteen, I flirty-giggled as I
batted Dad's hand away from
creeping under my dress and up my leg
at the dinner table. Sipping her Pouilly-Fuissé,
she chuckled, "Oh Dad, you're such a rascal," and
we laughed behind my older sister's back
for being such a prude about it.

But as much fun as we had together,
Mom was the last one I'd go to,
if I didn't know which way to go.

I'm trying to find my mother.
Is she looking for herself, too?
Is that why the thought of her
has nowhere to land in me?
Does she wander the bardo
carrying her Chanel bag, wearing
her huge, pear-shaped diamond?
Does it distract from what's in the bag?

What's in the bag, Mom?
What are you carrying?

The perfect hostess with the best laugh
in the room, you never showed your hand.
If you had ever let spill the bile of fuck up and tears,
maybe your name and our times together
would become visible on the page,
like invisible ink under the right light.
And we could find the buried treasure
of disinherited sorrow and unspoken grief.
Our bones would know kinship,
and you would be back home in my bloodstream.

Prayer for my Father

May it happen suddenly one morning,
while he sits at the breakfast table,
drawing solutions to engineering problems
with a felt tip pen on a napkin.
All in one moment, may it dawn on him,
for real, the darkness he has
visited upon his family.

May his heart break with the irredeemable
wreckage of it. May he drop his pen,
take his glasses off, put his head
in his hands, and let her rip, sobbing,
not even for our suffering,
anymore, but
for his own.

May he remember his innocence,
how it stumbled into the many bear traps
of cruelty set by his mother.
May he grok the hopeless lineage
of pain--all the way back to
who knows when.

These tears that fall because of what he sees--
because it cuts him with the truth--
because there is no going back—

I wish I could cry them, too.