

Submission title: Matters of Madness plus four more

Matters of Madness

God said a sea of suffering awaited the Hungarian,
a Benedictine monk in Maracaibo, a city so hot
cats pant like dogs.
Surgeons excised twenty inches of his coiled bowels, purgatory
in the bowels of the earth.
Holy disorders! He left the monastery.
Was God the first astronaut?
He saw Lucifer in the kitchen and chased him away
with a poker.
He saw Lucifer in hell, his forehead with the coiled serpent inside.
He saw Lucifer standing giant as the globe tempting the world.
The devil made noises in his apartment—knocking on the door,
imitating the alarm clock and drip drip drip under the sink.
Three archangels appeared flying horizontally
in their brownish-green mass vestments.
One day while he read in his study, the books, the desk,
the windows and the walls disappeared.
Before him stood the Virgin Mary fifteen feet tall bathed
in blue, white and golden light. Her skirt moved gently in the breeze.
Is there air in heaven? He dared not ask.
They never spoke. Now Mary is present everywhere elevated
in rank even higher.
“She is totally in me bodily. We are one. Thank you
for the sleepless nights...12:47 p.m. The record is 66
pages, second 65 pages. Praised be Jesus Christ, Istvan.”
It took one tormented soul with a typewriter
and 55 sheets of blank paper to compose a letter
to me, an author he admired with whom he made
a desperate attempt to connect
as the hosts of heaven and hell came to dwell
inside his mind.

My Mother's Ghost

My mother sees dead relatives
whose visits fill a vacuum.
"Uncle Gordon came to see me."
Mother, he's dead. Remember?

Neural networks fractured, floodgates broken,
visual images fired randomly stir
a tsunami of memories, hallucinations
and nonsense.

"We can throw batteries over the fence"
she says as her pale green eyes stare
at nothing.
"I wish the horse blanket would stop spinning."

A shriveled statue, a frozen face
pretends to be my mother.
She knows my name. She remembers me.
That makes one of us.

I remember my other mothers--
the mother who read Sunday comics to me pausing
to puff on a cigarette,
the mother who disliked Catholics who believe
popes are perfect.

I miss my other mothers—
the mother who sewed 2,000 pearls on my wedding dress,
the mother who deep-fried doughnuts, potato chips,
and then set our kitchen on fire.

Maybe this mother can see the dead.
Her soul hovers in a gauzy plane
of imaginary time and space, a wonderland
distorted and cruel, like Alice in Hell.

Last night in the Walmart parking lot, police arrested her
and threw her in jail. Could this be a dream I asked
instead of the truth?
"How do you tell the difference?"

Driving the Speed of Light

My mother never sped until she died.
Living thirty miles an hour drove her
to fill shoeboxes with clipped coupons and cram
the garage with enough toothpaste, cereal and shampoo
to last till the Second Coming.
Riding the brakes kept her close to home.
She missed watching her only granddaughter spin
ice circles on skates
and her grandsons karate chopping wood blocks in half.
In her unopened closet, forty-four pairs of pumps, loafers,
tennis shoes and sandals unworn waited
patiently for adventures that never came.
From the afterlife she showed up in our dreams,
my sister's and mine simultaneously steering
our fate from the driver's seat.
Her tires spinning at the speed of light
barely skimmed the street's surface.
"This is how they drive nowadays" she told my speechless,
wide-eyed sister.
To me she said, "If we're gonna make to the airport on time
we'll have to fly."
Death accelerated her freedom.

Freeze Frame

I close my eyes, the show begins at my grandmother's house in the den,
Long-haired teenage Uncle Billy, my little sister Peggy and I sprawl
across soft carpet, our heads propped on sofa cushions commandeered for comfort watching
"The Addams Family" in a wooden framed black and white television screen.

Gomez and Morticia in love mesmerize as they dance to harpsichord music
in their Gothic mansion. I wallow in imaginary happiness free from my father's red-faced
tantrums five hundred miles away.

My mother and grandmother's muffled voices blend in laughter in the kitchen. I can feel the
thump thump thump of high heels pounding the linoleum floor on the pier and beam
foundation. Stainless steel spoons clink glass bowls, the freezer door slams shut, the signal
shouts "Come get your ice cream before it melts!"

We race to slurp sinking mounds of black cherry and chocolate iciness while outside
sun-baked brick house and aluminum screen door sizzles in sweltering heat.
Venetian blinds block the sun's piercing rays, refrigerated air spews
from the window unit freezing our faces.

The Persian calico cat, Pershy, passes out under the piano bench. Sammy the featherless
parakeet, who looks more like a gerbil with a beak than a bird
in a cage, pecks at his pitiful reflection in the round jingle bell mirror and chirps "pretty boy!"

"The Addams Family" seems no more surreal than my grandmother's house
where my mother laughs and we are free of fear in our cozy cocoon.
No hot temper can shatter the illusion reflected in my mind.

When I replay the memory round and round, the sofa cushions sink deeper,
the ice cream tastes sweeter, and we stay safe forever frozen in time.

Star Crossing

The Lamb of God beneath the star,
Light of the world in a stable!
In rapture His Blessed Mother gazed,
The Christ Child touched her holy face.

Sheep and cows stood still on frozen fields.
The Magi watched the star cross overhead,
the heavenly guide glistened in silence.
Prized gifts they brought from foreign lands.

Bowing low, they honored the Son of Man.
His Sacred Head encircled by unbroken light.
Transfixed, they watched both halos blend,
Mother and Child, the two entwined.

The Virgin cradled the Infant King
Lifted from a manger's splintered wood.
Outstretched, His arms reached for His Mother.
Love enveloped the earth in one embrace.

Mary looked up at the brilliant star
Immensely bright spectacular.
Dazzling arms transformed, beams of a cross.
She hid the sight revealed in her heart.

Full of grace, she feared no earthly fate
Foretold in Scripture, foreshadowed this night.
A just man, Joseph marveled before
His most chaste spouse chosen by God.

The shepherds trembled and fell on their knees
All hushed and wondered as this night
Eternity intersected--one time, one place,
The Incarnate Word, the Savior of our race.