

IN LIEU OF FLOWERS

I found you in the deaths today
—over coffee and dry toast;
we were out of butter again—
And I wondered how it is you
could be gone and me still here.

The clipping said you went
suddenly and, in lieu of flowers:
Donations were to go to the
Humane Society, and I knew
right then that you had given in
after all; it's like a code that one.

Do you remember how we laughed
in group when that woman first
talked about it, neither one of us
believing for a minute it could be
true. Now you've gone and done
it, proved her right, haven't you?
You crazy son of a bitch ...

I really can't believe it after
all the promises we made to each
other, that no matter how bad
things got, *that* out was never going
to be an option—What the hell
happened?—Why didn't you call?
Why didn't I?

My coffee was cold by the time
I stopped weeping...
Yellow roses were your favourite
if I recall correctly; I think I'll
send those.

LONG HELD GRACE

You know me and my ghosts
in the bizarre way only someone
nestled in the shadowy whistle-stops
of life, clinging to the overhead straps,
getting blisters and sores
from always holding me—balancing us both—
while my sanity seeps through
our scorched fingers, over and over
knows me.

Your forehead is perpetually smudgy
with the effort of trying to save me;
But never—
Never do you show a smidge
of restlessness in your eyes.

ENOUGH TO GO ON

For the record, it's exhausting, you know? Trying to hold my head up when I hear "slut" or "skank" skittering at me, every time I need to stumble down the hall, to change classes or use the bathroom...whatever
Inevitably I a glimpse of my photo-shopped face taped up inside some guy's locker. I know it's not authentic because even on *that* night, I never had a penis in my mouth—no matter what the latest piece of rank gossip is—I *do* remember every degrading minute and the *real* photo, the one on the Internet and God knows how many other places—Well, everyone can see it shows a whole other part of me being screwed, *and* my face, Of course, it shows my freaking, highly identifiable face.

Being gang-raped is horrific—and four *is* enough to constitute a gang, I've learned, but it gets worse;
Imagine someone taking a picture of you as you are being held down and assaulted violently, That's right, one of the boys took a picture, a close-up actually, with his phone;
A picture of his friend "doing it" to me—raping me—and then he e-mailed it to everyone he knew...
Next thing I know, it's "gone viral" and it's up on websites, and what everyone calls, with obvious relish, "social media".
Almost immediately, even my so-called friends started avoiding me, like I'm some kind of scrubby porn actress.

It's hard to explain but suddenly I started feeling like it must have been my fault; I was so ashamed.
People I didn't even know were posting that awful photo and saying the worst things. I started spiraling down a hole that was thick with bottomlessness; I couldn't see a way out. Maybe I didn't deserve to get out—maybe it *was* my fault—everyone said it was.

The cops, they interviewed the boys I accused, more than once they tell me. I can still hear the gruff and oh-so-sententious voice of the officer as he declared, "... not enough evidence...your word against theirs... four to one...you're a smart girl, I'm sure you can understand our dilemma..."
Oh sure, from the depths of my despair, I could understand perfectly.
First I was raped by the boys, now I was getting raped by the system
This was even after I'd described in detail the rococo painting, possibly an original—I remember thinking, it might be important to remember that—in the boy's parents' bedroom
The one I'd been staring at the whole time they'd been violating my body...
It still wasn't, "Enough to go on..."

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Hanging from a hook on the back of a door doesn't kill you instantly, I learned, no matter how well you think you've gauged the length of the cord and the weight of your body
From the back of our bathroom door, my chin insists on nodding, and I'm doing this weird bobble-head thing.

Behind my eyes there are neon rainbows swirling and shattering, like glasses of anguish
Way off I think I can hear my mother begging me to do something but I just can't.

If I could speak I'd tell her, "I am sorry, but this is it...not an opening gambit Mom—I *am* the sacrificial pawn, and I am gone to join the circus ... be happy for me!

I have donned the red-sequined leotard and the white-feathered head-piece
And I am hanging by my knees from the highest trapeze and I am soaring ...

MY POEMS ARE...AS ENIGMATIC AS THIS: A MANIFESTO

My poems are an accident you just cannot drive by
and a stand of old growth paper-white birch trees.
They are worn-in comfortable slippers,
and red leather stilettos with bows at the ankles.
My poems are hidden thoughts never to be revealed,
and a race-car being driven fast on the Autobahn.
They are detente, unborn children, and notes of music
not meant to be played and, one black ballet slipper.
My poems are rain pouring thick, forked lightning, faded love
letters, thousands of migrating monarchs on the wing,
an off-white finger-nail slim, crescent moon; oil-on water rainbows,
cerulean dragons, Schroeder's cat, and, ancient stained-glass windows.

My poems are death, and ashes, and the colour of smoke;
the promise curled inside a baby's fist released.
They are the sound when a toddler giggles,
and the result of drowning in too many tears wept over
too much foolishness.
My poems are sobs heard in the silence that is the dark
that is darkest before the dawn, plus a garden I neglect
as often as I nurture it, one that rewards me with blooms
far more often than I deserve.
My poems are fears faced, the elephant in the room,
the herd that comes to grieve with no invitation nor notice.
They are my favourite pair of hiking boots, a warm fire
in the fireplace
burning hotly, a protest march, a lullaby, an Ave being sung
by my daughter; a sunrise caught at the moment of sun-birth,
and the same for moonrise, a Tuscan vista out a castle window.

My poems are the view from the Terrace of Infinity in Cimbroni,
committed to memory; and Paris, Provence, Roma, Milano,
Venezia, Verona, New York City, the Scarborough Bluffs,
and the Salt Spring Islands.
My poems are fireworks bursting in air, and music played loud,
in all genres; cellos weeping, pianos that talk, bluesy voices,
bruised ones too.
They are art on canvas, and graffiti everywhere, words written
in stone, and in sand at low tide; calligraphically magnificent
works of art and scribbles illegible, the same day...

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My poems are candles of hope in windows dark,
and hurricane lanterns at the end of a dock.
They are horses, daughters, and grandsons; neglected children,
and the scent of babies; homeless folk who tear my heart out,
and Leonard Cohen who does the same.
My poems are writing out fear and regret, and hope and elation,
a rose exploding its petals in death
My poems are loss, and ashes, and the colour of smoke;
the promise curled inside a baby's fist released.
My poems are the love of my life, who permeates it,
and frames it both.
And finally, my poems are rage at indifference and injustice,
and struggling to stay sane in an insane world, following
the beat of my heart, and my own true north.