

Test-Subject Son

He remembers eating Grammy's cupcakes for breakfast,
the half-moon bite from the whole stack of bologna
while his momma slept.

A string of her boyfriends...
the shabby apartment they shared with one of them;
reluctant caregiver during her graveyard shift.

Deadbeat parent, to faceless sperm, to new father...
"Daddy", but never "Dad"
rolling thick off his tongue.

His original last name different from hers
and the one he later shared with sisters ten and twelve
years younger.

Those innocents, oblivious to his position...
unchanged by legal ceremony and years of
playing house.

Fly Home

Sharing a room and her last years as a teenager
Nursing in the dark morning hours before high school
A peach-colored prom dress, cow soaked and heavy
with the weight of worry.

He stores no memories of youthful hands
Cracked and bleeding for the price of minimum wage
Late nights searching keys on the electric typewriter,
writing their ticket to an opposing destiny.

She remembers...holding the boy and the thick cardboard book
“If I had a Little Airplane”; his dimpled hands clapping
The joy of familiarity, his recitation of the verses,
his delight at the reunion of mother and child.

Introduce a father, an architecture of fortitude and family
Olive hands to mold a Pinewood Derby car
Steadying the T-Ball stand and coaching the team,
maintaining expectations with each strike-out.

Make-way for two dancing sisters, with ribbon and tutus
The quintessential family, full cast and crew
Loving hands prepare home-cooked meals; her very essence,
“Mother” defines her.

A fermenting disquiet swells beneath her semblance
Cocktails replace bed-time stories, a camouflage
Dred-locks and beads and a VW Bus buzzing in at the 11th hour,
anesthetized to the taut tether between them.

Three cracks at college, he follows suit; a drink in his hand
A malaise in his brain. Pallid hands press the board book pages,
Velvet wine muting her throat, she hears his earnest promise,
“I’ll fly home to you.”

A Galaxy Far, Far Away

She keeps the Star Wars collectibles in boxes
in the garage attic.

Han Solo forever searching
through plastic confines,

The Wampa snow-creature, white and furry,
frozen in predatory pose,
beloved by his baby sister,
fangs and all.

She thought about selling them
once,
at a garage sale.

The couple inquiring, casually checking
EBay,
bids on comparable treasures...

In the end, she couldn't
let go,
sealing the worn flaps,
packaging tape stuck
to her fingers.

Radio-Flyer

Pieces of a motorcycle contained in rubber tubs and a rusty Radio-Flyer wagon, disassembled beyond reconstruction—yet still safer in my care-cluttering the third bay of my garage, like a messy guest or a bad influence of a friend I’m keeping him from hanging out with. He couldn’t ride a bicycle until he was eleven for Christ-sakes. A motor-cycle is a one-way ticket to death.

Like some grade B, Lifetime movie’s overdone attempt at foreshadowing, his first father figure damaged his brain and his life on a motorcycle. Every night for years, I’ve housed the puzzle-pieces of this monstrosity, and guaranteed my boy’s safety—and my ability to sleep.

Now, you’ve cleaned the garage of mattresses and broken dryers, and bikes of thirty-year-old sons have to go. The truck is loaded with the red wagon and the containers containing the hundreds of parts you assure me the boy will “never be able to reassemble.”

On Wednesday, you’ll make the five-hour trip to Gunnison and deliver the motorcycle shell and all its guts. Will I admire the spacious garage?

When I sleep, I will dream of Radio-Flyer wagons containing the broken pieces of my son.