

## If All Men are Dogs

I'm more lap  
than hound  
or attack

the kinder kind  
of pettable pet  
you might find

rolled on its back  
belly exposed  
to any willing hand

hind leg, my dear,  
pawing madly at  
nothing but air.

## Bitch

Mother wasn't a breeder.  
But she felt proud, I think,  
asked once to stud out

her pure French poodle,  
the only one in the house  
certain he was loved.

Though sex was a word  
forbidden in my mouth,  
my father let me watch

some pup in pink bows  
arch her curly rump  
and look comely back at us.

Lamed by lust our dog  
humped across the lawn.  
Each time he'd mount

she'd turn and snap.  
If my father had a motto,  
I'd guess it was, "Say less."

Staring straight ahead  
he didn't take the chance  
to say something seminal,

just pointed out bluntly,  
"The female is a bitch,"  
teaching me breeding lingo.

Under my shallow breath  
accepting what was given  
I polished the rare word.

## Bottled

I admit the salivating dog in me  
was practically pawing the waitress.  
Pavlovian, I know. But, my god,  
crème brûlée infused with lavender,  
brandy-flamed to a bittersweet glaze?!  
Oh, what a sad mammal I make.

Take, for instance, the boy I was,  
entranced on the back porch  
secretly touching first one breast  
then another, then another,  
until I'd fondled all eight,  
her pups, by then, sold off.

Scoff if you want. But I've seen you  
eyeing all evening those sequined  
cleavages leaning dangerously close  
to the guttering mood candles  
while the busboys handle themselves  
with a decorum befitting their ties.

Lies. We're full of them. Here's one.  
A young friend once underwent  
breast enhancement and was satisfied  
to claim or blame self-esteem issues  
instead of Fifth Avenue's view of beauty.  
But I say, what about duty to species?

Jeez, these days when a baby cries,  
more often than not it's the father  
fumbling for a bottle while the mother's  
blushing and blotting at the Rorschach  
stain embarrassing her blue dress.  
But this is what mammals do best.

Breasts, for crying out loud,  
it's what the word "Mama" means!  
... Ah, dessert is served, I see.  
Nothing like a little dairy therapy  
to ease my childhood denial. I'll try  
with a spoon to break through.

## Grave Creek, 1983

You can't knot a cat  
in a burlap sack  
to add its thrashing  
to the braided creek

and blame it on 'hoods  
like neighbor- and child-  
to call it all good.  
Bad's got a habit

of clawing back home  
no matter the stone  
you've made of your heart.  
And when, not if, when

that scratching begins,  
don't open the door  
to that old wrong like  
*What took you so long?*

Take what is given,  
as in this satin ribbon  
you find yourself tying  
in your daughter's fine hair,

as the catalyst it is.  
Was it red? Was it?  
What you once slipped  
from that purring neck?

## Notes

Evening falls as starlings  
arrange their body song  
along the power lines

above a boy who remains  
composed despite the white dog  
nosing his lowered left hand

while high in his right  
he holds a bowlful of deep  
blue blueberries

a negative image of night  
an inverted porcelain sky  
a panorama of anti-stars

somehow akin to the car  
parked at the end of the drive  
a 1934 black Packard

a father's manly dream  
propped up on blocks  
cobwebbed to the ground

a fulcrum between a boyhood  
long past and the future  
of a fragile musical son

whose only task tonight  
is to sing with the spheres  
eating them note by note.