

SixFold Entry- thanks for reading

### **Laundry, Two Days After Giving Birth**

“Sleep when the baby sleeps,”  
they warned at my shower.  
I hate it when clusters of women  
give cliches as advice,  
so I just nodded  
as they echoed each other, a Greek chorus.

Now, my body hums with exhaustion,  
but here I am, sweat soaked and still bleeding,  
folding my postpartum jeans  
and husband’s boxers.  
Here I am, surrounded by piles  
that have everything to do  
with my dirty floors and deflated pouch,  
the sour smell in the fridge  
the lactation nurse  
kneading me this morning,  
trying to draw milk from stones.

My hands move mechanically, sorting  
instead of slipping  
into stolen rest.  
I curse the hot water cycle  
when I see one of my white socks all shrunken.

Oh.

For a beat, I hold it to my cheek,  
lullaby soft.

## **Bernie at the Inauguration**

there is no steam wafting from my toddler's microwave  
only frisbee of spaghetti clacking against corn

plastic presented to me with a flourish  
*mommy is so hungry grunt num num num*

this is his game, but i know my role is that of insatiable  
to relish - to request the next course,

but then, my sister sent me bernie at the inauguration  
and, like you, we snickered at his mittens

all underdressed in beige like so many moth wings.  
Like you, we saw ourselves in bernie.

*It's you at my eighth birthday! my sister laughs,*  
and she was not not wrong.

I know the photo, a gaggle of girls still in bathing suits,  
And me sulking in the background on a picnic bench.

My cheap one-piece had saran wrapped my nips,  
and stupid Julie Nemire had pointed,

declared that I had whales to all the other girls' guppies  
while chlorinated preteens giggled.

so when it came time for a group photo,  
I crossed my arms over my chest, settled into my party for one.

I may not have smiled,  
but I was still there, wasn't I?

## Alert

girl turned live wire  
stride electrified

counting the white lines  
in the lonely parking lot

her eyes dart around  
until her reflection is pockmarked by rain  
until she checks the backseat of her Honda

those news stories of strangers  
and girls who wore ponytails or earphones  
hammer her sternum

meanwhile one of the guys  
she used to shopping cart race  
behind the safeway  
(until a manager docked their pay)  
snaps a selfie with the brunette from psychology

her mouth's gone slack, a gaping fish  
his fingers are splayed on her breasts  
as if trying to carry too much fruit

## From Big Mouth Billy Bass

as far as wall decor goes, I'm just rubber and wires and tomfoolery  
neighbors with an antique map of Maine,  
Nana's watercolor series of woodland creatures  
sandy footed grandkids grinning.

Those same grandkids swat at each other as pies are returned to the fridge,  
clamor to activate my animatronics  
I'm a sitcom sidekick: "What's that I smell??"  
catchphrase to canned laughter.

And they do laugh  
as my tail flaps as if to swim right off my plaque  
My pout gaping to "Don't worry! Be happy!"  
Gap toothed smiles and shrieks of "I caught a big one!"  
Hooked fingers in my mouth leaving the taste of salt

Al Green's hit is second  
joke as subtle as a stage whisper  
"Take me to the river" I bellow,  
"Drop me in the water"

From his chair, gramps' snores provide the alto and the bass.  
he never hit his children or wife,  
yet they tiptoed around his temper.  
Aunt Cheryl once asked nana  
*Did you ever think of leaving?*  
She laughed. *And let my garden go to hell?*

The deer mount reigning over the mantle,  
was once real, sinew and bone and grace  
Now he's a glass eyed trophy.  
As for me, I've made my peace  
as the fool in this Shakespearean comedy.  
My voice's landlocked, but did that stop you from listening?

## Hunger Strike

day three of his stand  
tiny fists smeared and rageful  
mashed peas in the rug  
no graham crackers here  
therefore, he hates everyone

the greek chorus chirps  
*just a phase just a phase*  
and yet I cut meat into stars  
and yet I choo choo spoons  
to the seam of his mouth

the pediatrician sighed  
when his growth chart  
stock market crashed  
*texture issues can be a sign of-*  
*he keeps eye contact but-*

*her: let me ask, does he sort his food?*

*me: no, not my boy*

now, my brain circles around  
his chicken legs, all knobs  
now, he lines up his black beans

they glare from his plate, that murder of crows  
the Internet chirps  
*Just a phase just a phase*  
and they were right about colic,  
so who am I not to believe them?

but what is motherhood  
if not an unlearning from the newborn days?  
what is motherhood  
if not the symbiotic slink of a tapeworm?  
An unfurling?