

## **MOUTH, LIPS, TONGUE**

A mouth is a loaded gun

Or a bucket of honey

Mixed with butter

On a sweet roll.

The lips whine and whisper

Breathing porcupine phrases

Or softly repeat

Some good news between

Soothing kisses on foreheads and cheeks

The tongue curls serpentine against teeth

Hissing dangerous rumors

Or plays gently on the palate

Measuring out words that heal the marrow

And straighten out the bones.

## My Graduation

I just graduated from being a seventy-year old child,  
running and playing with other people's expectations,  
breaking promises that were impossible to keep, pouting because  
my dinner was not cooked just right or did not look just right, especially  
mad because I never really could cook.  
Losing weight and gaining weight and being weightless about  
the weightier things of life. A mere babe in heels I can no longer wear because  
my feet defy how young I am in my head  
A crisscross  
with my late maturation where my grandchildren work  
electronic things that make me afraid  
of what they call "apps", of what they can do:  
how menacing they are, Skype, and Instagram and Twitter and all.

A salt and pepper head I refuse to dye since in the very near future  
I will be coming through a new world womb, I'll be fresh again, after  
I get out of this century which up to now, I thought was  
the one I was born in. The 20<sup>th</sup> century sounded so  
up-to-date up until yesterday, when my grand-daughter informed  
me she was born in 2007, 4:00 p.m. in late afternoon at a hospital  
in Anne Arundel County, Maryland. Wasn't I there, barred from the birthing  
room because I was making her mother, my offspring, nervous?

My graduation is exciting.  
I'm going through a time-zone stranger than the one I just left.  
On a forever vacation with a free itinerary limited only by me

I'm finally graduating into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. I'm late but  
I made it by the gray of a hair .

## My Mother Was Unemployable

My Mother was unemployable  
Except in our neighborhood where  
She sat on the porch at 1659 and  
Held other people's babies after  
20 years of holding us  
She sat with her light tan skin  
And freckled face and soft cushioned body  
My brothers and sisters and I Oh so loved  
The warmth, the plumpness from  
Ferocious child-bearing  
She was our planet we revolved around  
She was our center in a universe of broke down  
Houses, narrow streets, with funk-ball trees  
I now know as ginkgo leaves  
That maybe unknowingly their pungent aroma  
Increased sweet memories of my mother  
Who never worked a day of her life as a wife  
But always sat so comfortably on that tiny urban porch  
In Northeast DC rocking somebody's baby in her lap  
Holding them protective with open love in the solitude of her embrace  
Sometimes we were secretly jealous of how she gave herself away

To anyone that popped from a drug-drenched womb  
A Fetus that remembered its rejection before it became a real  
being in the light of day.  
Glad it, by a miracle, made its way  
To my mother's arms who was otherwise unemployable  
To the outside world, the one just beyond Benning Road  
And 17<sup>th</sup> Street in a world that was  
Unaware of a neighborhood mother who had more compassion  
For babies with poison in their veins from umbilical cords  
Of crack-head moms and the herpes laden who just did not care.  
  
Like all those social programs that just didn't care.

## Neighbors on the Corner

### Part I

They lived on the corner in a round house with rectangular windows and sad-shaped

hearts that sat at an angle in their chests, trying to decide whether they wanted to remain neighbors on the corner whose grass was eaten away by footpaths of people too lazy to make a squared turn.

And the yard's edge was bare every year and every per annum the neighbors on the

corner sat behind their beautifully carved door angrily lamenting the bareness of their grass (*to us it was just one little corner*) that otherwise was picture perfect, never disturbing their flowers or the ladybugs and butterflies that hung like jewels from their anointed petals.

So, it was a shame that one day a moving truck would sit outside to remove our neighbors

on the corner from their otherwise heavenly abode. We would miss their slightly bared corner of grass – *we didn't walk on it all that much* - and the loveliness of their garden with its summer smell of honeysuckle that crept from their yard into our skins.

Now, the neighbors on the corner who took their place are crude and drink all night,

tossing beer cans out the window with abandon and delight. By some mystery the flowers still remain intact, untouched. But proprietors sit behind a battered door, screaming obscene things between guffaws and shrieking laughter. Not just one corner of the yard is bare. *All the grass is naked, surrounded only by a kingdom of living jonquils and chrysanthemums.*

Somehow we feel we must cover ourselves in grief. Profanity is a killer.

### Part II

Joe and his mother (before she got saved) cussed each other up and down Kramer Street,

ending that contest in a corner of their neglected yard surrounding their house. If Joe fell drunk and naked into her flower bushes (survivors of sloshes of beer and Jack Daniel), she cussed him and his dog. And Joe (before he got crippled) cussed his dog *and* his mother at the same time. It was a miraculous synchronization.

Now when the dog barked back, Joe knew that dog was being impudent, especially if it sat

on the corner, tail stiff (before it got sick and died). Joe, being an expert on rebellion, knew dog-cuss words when he heard them. He threw his whole jug of Thunderbird like an Olympian champ, but it missed that mixed breed because it was part whippet and one-third greyhound. Joe cried when it died. From that day on, Joe developed a limp that no doctor could diagnose and he wound up in a wheelchair from somebody that lived around the corner.

So, I was glad when I came by one day to see my mother (who lived second house from the corner which was next door to Joe's)

and saw that it was quiet. His yard was neatly arrayed with un-neglected flowers surrounded by healthy grass while he slept peacefully in his hand-me-down wheelchair. My mother disclosed in soft low tones how his mother was gone to church around the corner. In sacred octave, she let me know that Ms. Mamie went to prayer meeting *every* Wednesday and that she had transplanted a honeysuckle bush from her yard to my mother's yard. Mama added, "*You know just got saved.*"

*The whole time she released these significant revelations, she whispered reverently.*

*She did not want to wake Joe.*

## Oh, Such a Love

I never saw such a love. He wiped her mouth with a candy-striped cloth and chased birds from the nest of her hair. The love - I never saw such that wasted not the wasted and desired the unwanted, protecting her from strange hospital beds and yellowed walls and nursing homes that saw her as income. *The Love*. It shamed me and what I thought I knew.

I never witnessed this kind of sacrament. He fed her with syringes of pureed beans and washed her shriveled body till it glistened like a baptized babe. He held her and spoke so gently and saw her with the eyes of a virulent lover. His love was a pleasure of purity. It was a divine sight. *Oh, such a love.*