

A Young Girl's Primer

Acquiescence is an art form.

Amount to an ablative and keep arithmetic activities under key and whisper.

Eschew á la mode, eat only argyle.

Do not be ashamed when alluding to asphalt, just bounce back from the backtalk.

Bleeding is your Battle of Waterloo.

Secretly, you are a bandit with a blouse made from a bandanna and a hip-flask full of bourbon—but think what the boys will believe about that.

Covet crowns.

Droning in the dark is disturbing, but daylight dancing should be done with determination.

Emergencies enable excellence.

Equate eggs with everything, track the fractured features on each face you meet.

Fear fright, fumble through fire.

Good girls are gregarious, but keep gingham knees glued together.

Hail hoods of red that can hide your head from the huntsman: he won't halt before halving your heart, placing it in a jewelry box to present to the jester.

Weave kites beneath the kumquat tree, and wait for your king.

Above all, be khaki and kind.

Kick kewpie dolls, displacing their lace leggings, then lament.

Speak the lapin language, but do not attach yourself to their linguistics.

Lose lust, lacerate desires. Live beyond the leaves. Love like the Lorelei, singing yourself into the lake.

Manufacture merchandise and mend your myths.

Mourn more and more, but make like you do not mind.

Mirror

I see the the girl I used to be:

Three-foot-two with flying skirts,

ruler of the internal kingdom,

a queen on five continents.

There's little girl splendid, advancer of justice,

lecturer to the disillusioned, valiant girl

with tin-foil tiara perched on pigtails,

sunlight and sullen girl, friend to squirrels,

destroyer of sunflowers,

converser with the streams and with wind,

guardian of ants and dragons alike.

There's back-of-the-classroom girl

hiding behind a thick notebook,

there is the pencil-stealer, the shoplifter,

advocate of all cantankerous, eraser of corrections,

avoider of sentences, collector of spite,

the scribe of the forgotten names.

There is the girl who talks with ghosts,

the one who believes in all the gods,

the writer of myths, lucky-coin-finder,

whispering to invisible creatures.

There is young girl mute, pointer of fingers,

eye-contact shirker, she who hoards useless

objects in locker piles. There stands

the girl who wishes for fate and ribbons,

for crayons and cigarettes.

There is sidewalk girl, roller-skater of the heavens,

saddle-shoe dancer, wielder of ruby swords,

champion of the indifferent, she who makes the moon

scowl to scare the stars.

There goes the dream-screamer,

The fire-bearer, story-shaker--

just another girl with lowered eyes.

Babel (Pantoum)

Strange vowels caught in your throat.
You were studying foreign languages
The summer that you and I were we.
I listened as you read from a textbook.

You were studying foreign languages:
I go. He goes. We have been going.
I listened as you read from a textbook
And tried to mimic each new utterance.

I go. He goes. We have been going.
We assembled a dialect of whispers
And tried to mimic each new utterance,
But gave up speaking after a while.

We assembled a dialect of whispers
In your bed that was covered with notes.
We gave up speaking after a while,
Your fingertips pressed into mine.

In your bed that was covered with notes,
I memorized the syllables of you,
As your fingertips pressed into mine.
Old voices lingered in warm air.

I memorized the syllables of you
As you slept in a stranger's flat
Where old voices lingered in warm air.
You told me that when you moved abroad

It was like sleeping in a stranger's flat
And you slipped and spoke your native tongue.
You told me that when you moved abroad
You tried to invent yourself anew.

We slipped into our native tongues
The summer that you and I were we.
Later, when we tried to speak ourselves anew
Strange vowels caught in our throats.

Monday Afternoons
for Will Goulet

You can't remember which saint it was.
The priest in mockingly ironed black said something
About one of the saints.

You drove and drove, radio thundering, circling endless suburban dreamlands,
Passing his home three times, a place you'd never seen.

You were the only one there, the other urban mourners still circling, cursing maps—
But everyone stared at you, as if you losing your way was the real tragedy.

You say the clinking of glasses would have been better eulogy than this,
Not like droning words falling memorized from relatives.

The real memorial should have been the last drinks you'd had together, him grinning,
Slurring, declaring, *If America is deceased the move on, soldier! Our time has come.*

You were tearless, dehydrated, dull, wanting a beer, waiting for someone to say
You're just dreaming again, take this, he's right here.

You'd never visited his childhood home, mothers and cousins unfamiliar now close,
Whispering in corners too-bright with yellow curtains, glaring dishes, food.

You say you'd have grabbed those cousins, that priest with the force of barfights,
Knuckles hitting cheap plaster, glass and liquid breaking.

You say you would have yelled down hard into their pious guts, screamed:
What are you doing here? Why bury him here and not with me?

*You didn't know him. You don't even call him by his real name. I want to tell you
What he was like. What I remember.* But for his mother, you didn't.

For her only son had gone from her, gone long before he left the world. So instead
You tell me, because you and I both heard what he'd really said last.

You tell me: *When it's really going to hit me is Monday afternoons.
That's when I'd see him, always. You know.*

*We'd say, oh I saw this show, I met this girl, or whatever. It didn't matter what we said.
I went through one Monday already and...it was....well...*

He still visits you
from behind cloudy glasses, Monday afternoons—
Wanting a proper, saintless burial.