

**pantoum for two seven-year-olds**

that evening when we talked at twilight  
she did not notice my awakening  
when she left me to go home  
I felt a tingle up and down my spine

she did not notice my awakening  
I was entranced by her rosy cheeks  
that caused a tingle up and down my spine  
the first night I was happy to be myself

her blue-black hair, her rosy cheeks  
our toes strumming back and forth in the dirt between us  
the first night that I knew myself  
how could there be anything wrong with this feeling

our toes stirring the dry dirt between us  
my pulse quickened, my heart wanted to burst  
I would never judge this feeling  
even though I could share it with no one

the first night I was happy to be myself  
she did not notice my awakening  
that evening when we talked at twilight

## My Monster

I need my monster.  
Most people are trying to get rid of theirs.

Lately I invite my monster in  
for a spot of tea  
and chocolate truffles  
that she claws  
from the fancy gold-wrapped box.

She's like a puff  
of green smoke  
left behind by  
the Wicked Witch  
of my hurts,  
ancient, real, and imagined.  
I'll tell you this -  
she only leaves  
when she's good and ready.

I have become accustomed to  
my monster  
sneaking up from behind,  
with her essence of sulfur and jasmine.

She is the shape of consistency  
in the kaleidoscope  
of my life.

My oozy, almost reptilian monster  
will surround me in a scratchy hug,  
wrapping around pain  
persistent as a toothache at midnight.  
She has shown me  
how to survive that long night  
when half my soul  
flew over the rainbow  
never to return.

She slurps comfort into my ear,  
reminding me  
we've been there and done that,  
no relying on  
the old excuses.

## Trust Exercise

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She has found me  
floundering  
in the undertow  
with water up my nose,  
saving me at the last possible moment  
from drowning or embarrassment.

Our buoyancy is real.

It has taken almost seven decades  
for me to realize  
she loves me enough  
to give me  
what I need  
when I need it,  
whether I like it or not.

## Cows

Cows seem to understand  
something about the world  
that we do not

It takes a lot to stand in a field  
all day without looking stupid

Inward-focused,  
appreciating the sun on their hide  
literally ruminating  
on life and grass

Their job is so clear -  
make milk, get the milk expressed  
twice a day

Much simpler than the bulls  
who have to keep up appearances  
and run around and find someone to  
impregnate and someone to fight,  
I suppose

Cows will always make me happy  
as I zoom by fields and farms  
they have perfected the art  
of noticing while not  
getting too excited about anything

Cows tie us to the land  
seem to say  
go on in your travels from city to city  
we've got the vitamin D patrol  
and the joy of rain on our backs  
and the evening walk home  
and the filling of metal jugs  
of our gift,  
our milk  
We've got plenty of company  
here in the herd

They are our proxy  
with Mother Nature  
The cows don't come home  
They are home

**Skeleton Key**

She often dreamt about that room,  
now only in chiaroscuro,  
even the prolific ivy that drooped down enough to tempt the cat  
reduced to shades of gray.

She thought that this apartment was the one  
where she would launch a stellar writing career  
despite the crippling depression  
that lurked in somber shadows.

Those windows! She could see the neighbors across the way,  
a pride parade of dinner guests  
popping corks and swapping juicy stories.  
The darkness dogged her like a persistent hangover,  
minus the fun memories of the night before.

Self-loathing and disheartened sighs  
enveloped her bursts of creativity,  
fireworks that sputtered and died  
before they reached the paper.

She remembered going to a black-and-white movie  
in one of those old picture palaces.  
Something about  
the characters' obliviousness  
to their own limitations  
brought her back to that place.  
She felt again that stubbornly florid moment  
when hope trumped capacity.

As she exited the film,  
she saw an image  
of the room  
superimposed  
on the curlicued green-and-yellow walls  
and the gold-striped carpet  
of the out-of-date lobby,  
rococo hallucinations  
of greatness.

The room  
where writing her truth  
seemed closer than ever  
but impossible to reach:

## Trust Exercise

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the plug that didn't work,  
the ivy that never died,  
the wood floor that had  
the decency to creak  
in predictable places,

the diffused light  
that made her feel  
it was all going to be OK  
someday.

These days she writes about  
what she feels,  
not what she thinks everybody wants to hear.

She sees herself closing the front door  
to that apartment,  
looking at the room  
for the last time,  
giving the key to the landlord,  
finally,  
with relief.

**Prayer Without Words**

O Virgen de Guadalupe  
We praise you  
Standing on a quarter moon  
your dress resplendent with stars  
Your brown face  
lighting up the world  
but not in a midday sun

Mothers who send prayers about their gang member sons  
Gang member sons with your image  
on the backs of their jackets  
The hopeless, the starving  
the weary

Virgen,  
You comfort all of us  
yearning to be free,  
carry the weight of the world  
for those who suffer  
because of an accident of birth  
or circumstance  
or the evilness of men

You say  
my son was unjustly murdered  
but I am not a victim

You never promise  
yet always deliver,  
a rock but not a redeemer  
Your robe a shelter  
for all our homeless desires  
even the love that dare not  
speak its name

The Statue of Liberty wishes  
she could be you

We bring you our grief  
so you can light our path  
but not too much,  
to keep us  
from being blinded

## Trust Exercise

*p. 8*

by sudden realizations  
too stark to face  
all at once

You are the warm breath of the mother,  
content to share her breast  
with any baby  
who reaches for it