

THE CHALLENGE OF GROWING UP IN THE MOUNTAINS (*4 poems*)

Poetry Slam

A dark man in rubber boots stands center stage, introducing.
The first, in boots and a lavender tutu, tangles language, says
she does not know who she is alone.
The second raps and bounces on his toes.
The flannel-clad third sings, discordant,
about his divorced parents. He wants to crush them like a
glass he cannot part with. A young woman with a
headscarf tells that
her history does not begin with slaves.
It was so cold out when we left, our eyelashes froze.
It was so cold.
But my brain felt like a Van Gogh painting, garish and stellar,
messed up, singing with paint and light.

Poisson Rouge (poem to my father)

As a child, very stout, determined
as a general, stern, bossy to his brother,
interested in wizards; very
curious; enough
to drop a glass-eyed toy monkey from a landing
down three flights of oaken stairs
to see how it would fall, and land.
The latter it did, on his grave great-
grandmother's head. Perhaps the monkey's
eyes lit red before more than peace was splintered.
As a youth, dark, in love always,
shy, bookish, somewhat suffering.
As a man, well put together, well off
friend-wise, otherwise poor, slick like a
swimmer, dark-browed, still.
As a father, concerned, kind,
worried, hovering, turning
like an old goldfish in a round aquarium, trans-
formed with gestures of elegant fins; bulb-eyed,
plug-nosed, bubbles of fancy and wit
sputtering upwards, airward, skyward,
while golden mouth shapes cautions
at the concave window of a rounded cage
of glass; transforming still, rich, golden, dis-
arming, dangerous.

The Facial

My treasures wait howling in a bowl;
a woman smelling of frankincense or is it cedar
enters and announces
in a voice like candlelight
that this is my time;
unflickering I drift
expand beneath her petal hands;
she takes them
one by one like two
gooey, fragrant, boneless
fish
meeting in a salty sea; it will be hard to
leave this aquarium of ease. My body is
liquidating, honeylike, new
traveling alone in an
almond coconut-scented underworld
of unfamiliar peace
of mind. This thick
and steaming breeze,
or is it a river,
bears me deeper aside and within. I'm
peaceful now, accessible to all
like the weather, like a
mountain of gold.

The Challenge of Growing Up in the Mountains

My skewbald pony, invisible to others,
as we make our way down to the beaver dam,
beyond the grove of maples, once tapped,
now left, because of the grasses, grown so tall, my
velveteen riding hat bouncing as
we trot out in front, the place

I'll always be if you'll let me.

My mother and sisters follow behind,
dappled by shadows and caught in a swoon
of humming insects, bees, and the summer song
of the forest and its damp embrace,
green upon green and soothing, vast enough

for their daydreams, but as I said, I am up ahead
parting a sea of grass,
leather reins loose in my hands because
this pony and I trust each other,
or so I imagine, as determined, we push on
towards the beavers and their dim, unseen,

mystical, falling-down eden, their ongoing constructing
of dams, eating of saplings, and
the bright blond blazes left there, along with sawdust
scattered salt-like on the ground—a
parallel lifetime, worlds away
from dishes, napkins, and polished spoons,

my grandmother doing needlepoint by the pool,
an empty hammock swaying in the shade.
She'll wonder where we've gone
and whether to delay the tea while praying for
no visitors from town—ones who might somehow,
in Lilys and pearls, alter the buzzing sunbright garden.

Peonies, honeysuckle, hummingbirds, flat-
faced pansies, she closes her eyes,
envisions us, scouting for beavers,
forests away, horse tails flicking, the
easily miss-able twitch of pointed chestnut-
colored ears, deerflies stinging, narrow paths,

meandering through the standing and fallen-down trees
of this place, a pond overgrown and stagnant,
world within world, unseen, inscrutable,
where not a beaver will be seen,
only the signs of beaver, the eaten trees,
the creatures themselves in quivering intermission

while snorting horses pound by
like a kind of weather that must be waited out
patiently. The horses' manes beneath our hands
is what I will remember, and the smell
of the horses, and the warm of sun,
the creak of tack, and the hope
and the dazzling, clandestine mystery
of the beavers, and then back home, no phones

to tell our plans through, not that, yet,
no portals to the place where my grandmother waits
worrying just a little
stitching more blue into the sky.