

Smile Time

The mission president liked my smile. I smiled during the meetings, when he said up wins, & down loses, when he pulled out the charts to show the other side of Idaho was beating us in baptisms. In Sunday School, or in the bishop's office, I smiled & nodded, till my neck ached. I smiled when the gold chained gang banger asked for my money & I pulled out a quarter. I kept smiling to keep my innocence, when they looked under our car for explosions, when we ran from the bomb, when they carted my biological father, foaming at the mouth, speaking in tongues, into the looney bin, when we immigrated to America, two crying babies, 400 dollars. You know the story, everyone was smiling, they smiled to high heavens, pristine white smiles for Candid Camera that played on our telly, in the trailer in Vallejo, slopping the Hamburger Helper into our bellies, even while underneath there might be something sinister, groping the rope of yourself in musty bathrobes, lighting a match to watch the shadows dance, the long nails of Freddy Krueger, the puzzle box of Pinhead. In Castelldefels, where we moved to escape the poverty & drizzles of London, the ball and chain of four hours of daily commuting, twisting the black soot from my nose, my hand under the bed, twirling with the darkness, asking for more horrors, laughing the devil's laugh, my eyes soaked in unsentimental tears & smiling, a catch and release, some kind of fishing pole, duplicitous or suspicious, or even stupid, a secret weapon, for good & evil, it covers & reveals, maniacal monkey grin, the radio humming its jungle hymns. Today in Sitges, the thickness of bodies, journeys in the wild dark sea, little mouth grenades in the evening, squeezing through them, learning from the smiles of dead men, sure of their mission, munching on grass, never one for the jazz hands, the dead have good grip, it whitens the knuckles, being here openly, ugly poor & gritty, the toil of bitterness sprung from the lips, look what you can do with your teeth. O taste & see, the smile of kindness.

In the Time of Saint Sweat

You were in a hurry to enter the gates of university. The first and only of your family. Can you explain your answers. You keep listening to Keith Sweat, washing your sweat in full colour, clipping long toenails into porcelain, primal screams without the scratches, atonal hums of trees. Can you explain your answers. There are so many kinds but the best kind is without knowing kind, just doing kind because it comes from somewhere kind, how do you get that kind, that's the mystery kind. You lose your soul but find it again on Saturday. It is hard to find your soul on weekdays. Soul sweat in the pantry, soul sweat at the train station. How do you want to shape it? You lay out your sweat on the wagon wheels of progress. Pioneer Day with armies of bonnets. You lay out your sweat & it slips out like a shudder cock. You lay out your sweat, you can suck it back later. Oh misty-eyed blue creatures crawling at the bottom of the ocean. Oh long chain of human kindness. Velvet chocolates, salads with shallots by the seaside. The best patty is the peppermint patty. The soul delights in the body. When we arrived, we discovered we had never left. When we departed, we discovered we had already arrived. The soul needs a sweaty handjob. Pretty souls in sweaty flavours. Perky souls in sweaty colours. When you lay your body upon the rocks, the sun sweats it. Tight roping the soul to a gallant racehorse or lipping it to a new algorithm? Your dog helps you feel part of the animal family. Your soul grows cloudless as the wandering weekends.

Straw Time

Newly Mormon in our social housing, mother with Farrah Fawcett hair, shaggy swirls, father with old world moustache, we played straws. Trying to pull one straw from another straw without disturbing the other straws. Son of man, pick up these straws. Father one, out there somewhere, probably homeless, in America. Father two, out there somewhere, probably drunk, in Belfast. Fallen fathers, sick fathers, war fathers. My Belfast father slung on the brown couch on the Shankill, watching the Almo, ordering his red wine & beer for delivery when he cannot stand up. My disco father, burying his way out of the British army, fleeing that country, moving to London, homeless hostel, clutching at straws, trying to build a family. Mother at 22, with 6-year-old son, Play yr Kardz Right on the telly. Young fathers, damaged fathers. Belfast father with damaged mother, her clinking wine bottles, her scrunched face, she comes to take me away, climbs through the window into the dark night air, or, in the kitchen, bakes me into the meat pie. I lucid dream her, many years later, throw her down the stairs, break her neck, chop her into little pieces. My soldier father, living out of his truck, no longer Mormon, another dream cult, somewhere America, clinging to the rock of truth that keeps crumbling. These fathers pulled through the desert by the great father, who sits atop the pyramid shimmying. There are too many fathers, not enough fathers, roaming the desert of fathers, the fathers & rumours of fathers.