

THE DAUGHTER OF MAN

The Mooning 1986 (Etiology of the Cauldron)

Once when my sister and I were roughhousing
with our boy-neighbor, they made fun of me, so
I stood on the guest room bed and mooned them,

pulling my pants down low enough to convey my ire
—all the way to my knees—,
bending over far enough to emphasize

my commitment to the gesture
—folded in absolute half—.
They laughed harder, a lot harder, doubling and

draped across each other until they lost breath,
and my sister finally wheezed:
We could see everything . . .

. . . I fled the howling room and went to
find my mother, pretending—with my face on fire—
to be interested in the contents of a simmering pot.

She could tell something was amiss, and
when they careened into the kitchen
and told her, she struggled not to laugh,

but soon the whole house closed its eyes,
pursed its lips into a line, and strove
to keep the cackle from boiling over.

Plinko

If I held our thermometer up against
a light bulb
or dipped it in my tea
I could stay home
99.9
100.3
& watch *The Price Is Right* at
11 o'clock
from the couch
apprentice
my mother who narrowed her eyes
delivered cinnamon toast
delivered
my pillow from upstairs to my
nest while I
mumbled prices
remarked on groceries I
didn't realize were sponsors
watched models ensorcell
me gesturing at automobiles like junior hags
defeathering jumbo American fowl
bee dump da duh
Broyhill dining sets
bee dump da duh
condensed soup
Tang to the moon
tuh dee dee tuh dee dee tuh dee dee
contestant bounds onstage spacesuit-boots
plants her feet a flag
she comes in with her coffee stirring slowly
with a bid to check my head
that unabashedly undercuts *remarks on how warm*
everyone else's bid I feel
One dollar *Precisely as warm*
Too bad *as tea*
the actual retail price is *in that mug*
Nice try *Nice try*
smile as warm exactly
the temperature of
luck
dropping

Date Rape

Just 16 then, she was laid down
on a sandy bed and jabbed.

She said, *Hurry up*
when she meant, May this be over soon.

As when the sun goes behind a cloud.
She dipped her drunken hand

in sand and fed it into her mouth.
Grains formed a rune

on her tongue that said, Your life
won't be yours

unless you and shame collide. She replied
with nothing like what she meant.

She hoped sleep melted sand.
The bed, an hourglass, flipped sun

to moon. She thought to say
enough. Just 16, the boy

jabbing her kept on jabbing
until she woke again and flew away

like a kid leaping from lifeguard stand
to sand or a gull dodging a heedless boy.

She rammed louvered closet doors
off their track. What another boy's

face says when a girl falling
lands. She spoke not a word

when she washed up
in a tide coming in and out

of its own accord. She could have asked,
Did you deliver me? Or

fail to make me drown?
but when she woke to hands

and a blanket swaddled,
she thought, There's little difference.

Maybe warn the birds instead.
This is what they do

when they break your wing
for you. Trundle you into the car

in a shoebox jabbed with holes,
pretending it's your decision

to mend. The tide blames the moon.
Having collided once, too,

she is herself a convalescent.
Both bruised and bright.

The Daughter of Man

He's biting that Apple—
snake jaw unhinged, not minding
the slow upstaging meal.

If he commits to suckling
what he damages forever,

he can fancy himself loyal,

mistaking gore for gallantry.
It doesn't occur
that fanging the forbidden

stops him short
of tasting, chewing,

taking her deeper within.

Once we compel him
to free Apple,
with her waxen pallor

and leaf of surrender,
his jaw will ache.

His mouth,

a damp cavern,
will have dripped
its own stalactite fangs solid,

forever propping
his scream

open.

Self-Portrait as Molly Pitcher

I wore a Diana Virgin Goddess mask despite my contrary status, pouring pitcher after pitcher for Revolutionary soldiers. O, how I wanted to scabble over their terrain—rough and uneven—alongside the wagon train, doubling back and over, scouting for the best brook from which to collect, trekking upstream of their latrine, and, with each tipple and ladle into a patriot mouth smoked and pursed, I lost a little of my name. *Over here* morphed from a whistle into *Pitcher* then someone added *Molly*, and I guess I could've put the bucket down, subordinated myself a little less like a spaniel than a swatch of fodder for the cannon, but at the time, they seemed basically the same. *Betsy Ross, you know her?* As though hookers working the same corner are necessarily friends? I never met her until they locked us both up in an inset box. There in the basement of a history textbook page, we didn't even speak. My role was only pathetic volunteer, keeping parched heroes hydrated, but Betsy, she stitched and sewed their symbols together. After that, all we saw were stars.

Trompe L'Oeil

Like a kid climbing through the window: eyes wide, shirt billowing open with the heat of hijinks, I'm back—grabbing you by the Peter Pan collar to chew gum in your class, drop your hall pass in the toilet, and eat your breakfast for lunch. I won't recover my manners, no, they're pinned up there under the postcards, ribboned fast to a bulletin board between lion and lamb. You sat the girls in the back of the class and taught math to the front. And I guess I have the option of being less mad, but my upset's been tipping on the precipice forever, like a Medici cherub poised for a rotunda-fall.

Mrs. K., you taught me that certain things weren't mine to have.

Mrs. K., you taught me not to ask.

Mrs. K., you taught me to accept confusion.

You taught me to pretend the door to your teacher's coat closet was a portal to a much larger room because we sat—dutiful and diligent 2nd graders, the way you admonished us to be—while you went inside with the janitor and disappeared. We never asked even though all thirty of us knew its phone booth dimensions: big enough for one coat and a broom—and, apparently, two full-grown adults. And when you came out—three connect-the-dot run-offs later—I'd like to recall you tugging your pearls and taming flyaways with nervous hands, but I think not. I see you clearly: circulating among rows one through four, calmly cooing and crooning. Like pedestrians quizzical about an airbrushed crater, the girls blinked and tried to puzzle perspective out.

I'm untying this blue satin ribbon and freeing our violin from effigy. I'm translating *This is not a pipe* for those who don't already know. I'm walking to the front of Room 2B, past those kids still sitting there in 1982, past me in corduroy culottes, past the guinea pig in its box, past the closet door where you found love's semblance.

To your desk. But I'm not going to sit. I'll stand. Mrs. K,
I'll wait. I'll hold up my fingers 1-2-3. Do you see it? The picture I've
painted for you . . .

. . . of my thanks.

Pool

As I sit on a lounge in yellow-pink September,
I look up to see a monarch sailing about
against a sky I can only honestly describe
as azure. Here's a cerulean pool cut like
a quilt panel into the lawn, which is genuinely
emerald, and for an added touch, some wag
has left a gigantic sliced lemon floating
and scudding against the pool's walls
with a gentle breeze. The monarch seems
to follow the lemon as though they're tethered.
I lie back and think about my gorgeous luck
to be here—alive, well-fed, safe, able, cognizant,
and so on—until I get greedy then wonder
how much better this moment would be if
you were here, if we were together. And,
of course, this brings me to—
as the butterfly dips behind a tree in shadow
(and so it, too, must know)—
how difficult it was to please my mother.

General Accident

Come sit with me a spell
and tell me good news but if there's none
 we'll speak as we usually do of horrible things
 Of events out of control spun
 Of forces once controlled now
not Devoid as reason
flying standby
 In short: let us sit and do what we can
do

to admire the problem
 a phrase from Consulting my first job at 22
 optimizing Claims for insurance companies
like *General Accident*

 I sat in a dolorous conference room
 windowless bereft
of contact unless a resentful
Adjuster poked in to watch me spinning
his world with Excel
 data faxes

 This was a different sitting not a spell
 And neither was the sitting in taxis at gates on planes
for the flight back to Philly on Fridays
 I was always pulling something behind me

 Like a black bulb my bag dragged
a sac of venom/eggs/silk to stand by wait with wonder
sometimes aloud that I had such spinning
at my disposal a gift gotten from seeming nowhere
 Such turns of web
 Such phrase of turn
 And I forced my horrible mouth to shape

thanks to a flirty Agent for the upgrade
for a spell from proportion logic until

a horrible thing came crawling out
 caught now interposing
as a fly buzzing and we it and I talked then
of nothing whirring of wings of sky before we flew
 fed on the sound of each other
going
gate after gate treading wrapping
seatbelts around what we did
do in DKNY black suits
that came with a skirt and pants but only one jacket
cut for men
 Controlling who we
 Whir
 Speak Sit a spell

Girl Icarus

On undulant ocean Icarus lay
Tallow wings sizzled formed

a raft that bore her
upon crested waves to land

Icarus strode curling broken arches
over crushed stones stumbling

because falling fractures
fragile bones

Icarus lazed
beneath bowered lemons savoring olives

hearing healing
knit

tallow drip
by olive pit

Sky meets sea in a line as thin as decision

as soft as lemon pith as hard as falling flapping
pliant wings against leaden air

losing loft letting go
tumbling chance from

a dragging undertow

O

wingless seed marooned stone
if held if held if

you hold yourself
high close one eye

you can
eclipse sun

