

We Are All Bad Mothers Here

Our children sail up into the trees like kites.
We buy them things they don't even like:
dolls and Sawzalls, used thuribles, those
chattering wind-up teeth with feet that hop
across the counter like a nightmare.
Our children have nightmares
because we let them watch *The Exorcist*.
Because we withdrew them from that school
for the elite kids when they asked us
if we'd accepted Jesus as our savior.
We are all bad mothers here. We swim
down into our screens
and don't come up for hours. At the park,
we dream between the covers
of novels while our kids grow fins and shark-
bite each other's flesh. We are all bad mothers
here, the Country of Frozen Nuggets,
Province of Froot Loops, we nursed too long
or did not nurse, we stuck their bawling bodies
into bed beside us when they would not sleep.
Now they wander. They ask questions
about history we cannot answer. They ask
our names and we cannot remember.
At night, we call our mothers to consolidate
our sins. We pull out our hearts together.
Rotten, we confirm. Like an apple, rife with worm.

In Praise of Jenny Marx

It is right that you lie
beneath Karl's bronze head
in Highgate, beneath his

tumescent mustache.

Right, too, to live with
his mistress (your housekeeper)

and sell the watchfob,
your mother's china.

It was right that you ate

like peasants, kept the coal low,
right to bury gray baby after
baby; and right to take

the dictation, the dictation, the dic-
tation from the man with
handwriting like a spasm.

It was right, the cast iron
weight of the sewing needle,
to pawn the spoon

of *baroness*. It was,
because your mind lit
like a forge with him.

So I guess it's right
you're no feminist emblem—

except a little part

of me delights

in your three surviving children:

named Jenny,

Jenny,

and Jenny—