

X

The clay turning on the wheel, placed
in fire and in time. Fingers learning
to shape the life moving through us.
The inside of the vessel is alive
with the shadow of our souls.

Others make bread, build houses, hammer in nails,
fix car engines, write poetry, hold babies.

Some lie with their words. Some lie with their faces,
their hands always give them away. Love and poetry
course through our fingers to make shapes of our clay.

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Priscila Uppal

Magdalene Desires

My effort is clandestine: to locate you
in the remotest places of our darkness, groping

for a hand, a piece of leg, the puncture of a
rib, and mould it to my spine like your long

ledgers that detail my famous sins,
forgiveness, pre-forced acts, love bites,

and over by the tall brick walls
where our names rest and the golden

calf crouches like an anguished animal, unsure
of slaughter but suspecting its assault over

the horizon with the first clanging of the bell tower.
My nerves rattle like a snake you invented
to amuse the children, its hypnotizing dance

the proud parade of a long line of witnesses,
shedding skins at break of day. It is cooler

in other countries, this motion for which we
give many names, this forward spiral, unentered

entry, vast well of clear forbidden water.
Bless me. I've no pride, nor confidence to speak
of you to my family or friends. Meet me
when I least expect you. Wear my favourite perfume.

I will prostrate myself, and you will know me
like a stone smoothed to shape by an eager hand.

Rilke and I Exchange Emails

He in his castle & me in my basement
we send each other short updates
on our mental travels, prescription advice,
& religious jokes.

We never post or discuss poetry.
Every three months we change
our passwords & must guess
via subject headlines based on
past correspondence.

My therapist says this is called
an emotional affair & I should come clean
to my partner about it. But I respect
Rilke's fame & want to keep our
records to ourselves.

Notoriety precipitates secrets
& short form. Today he forwards a recipe
for removing wine stains. I solicit aid
with my crossword. I can't think of
a five-letter word for everlasting life.

Neighbourhood Watch

The old woman with her binoculars monitors the cat
slouch groggily up the driveway. She has her grocery bags
and her priorities in order; her coupons like winning

poker chips stacked along the linoleum counter top.

Blue boys and pink girls confront teachers and the playground
slide. Milk distributed at lunch like the first letters of
the alphabet. Deficient sorts learn sandbox and extortion;
the good looking perform smiles for extra credit.

Car alarms trigger squirrel tag.
The corner store owner sweats outside his popsicle freezers.
The lawnmower unburdens a confession.
A smudged fingerprint states the facts.

We snuggle underneath covers. Toes touch toes, shiver.
The chimney puffs out messages translucent and precarious as dreams.
On the porch, the old woman lays down a cracked dish.
Abroad the borders shift again; the town clock weighs in on its knees.

The book I'm reading claims binoculars encourage conversation.
Says this lamppost hypnotizes cars into driveways.
It's crucial we answer our census forms truthfully:
in the coming months we must register our memories at city hall.

An Exercise in Recovering Your Inner Child

Priscila, it still stings to have no mother and
father's legs remain eternally useless no matter
how many pleas you make to God or how firm
your resolve to remain a virgin until they are returned.
You will cease, in time, hiding in closets pretending
to be invisible or scrapbooking dandelions to save them
from lawnmowers, but you will continue to bite your nails and
love men who sometimes scare you with their despair. Thankfully,
you will give up your aspirations to be a world class pianist and
wetting the bed. Visions of the Virgin Mary & the assault

of crab apples against windowpanes will wane during storms.
Your dreams will evolve into more precise categories and
you will learn the art of deflection and fill your allotted space
with rescued cats and books, the way you always knew you
would, even as the motorbike revs that will scar your left leg
for life (half-moon print of a pointless puncture) and send you
peddling home with the dull pain of pointless anger, eyelashes
falling one by one on the gravel road to where, intermittently,
on days where you are gratefully ignored, it feels like something
your gut calls home. They'll grow back, my dear! I promise.
Whether you want them to or not. They'll grow back!

Epic Theory

Everyone wants to be the hero.
The man—or woman, let's not be rude—
who embarks on wild adventures,
earns boatloads of prizes,
sails triumphantly back home.

Everyone wants to be tight with the gods.
Or at least 'intimate,' on a first name basis,
barring that, guided by their prickly hands,
no act completed without prior approval
and ephemeral lackeys counting scores.

Everyone wants an introduction and a conclusion.
A middle, an arc, a theme song.
For oracles' words to be worshipped as truth,
for birds and winds to be translated as signs.

Everyone wants a final chapter, a swan song,
a son or daughter to whom to pass on
the tremulous future, a landscape of
fragrant flowers in which to fall and die.

But the majority perfect the chorus.
Nameless, androgynous, and masked,
out of danger and fame's way, mere echo
of what the crowd already thinks.

On Receiving a Crown

I used to dream of being Queen
—now life inflicts daily lessons
in humility,
I can't even trust my teeth
to ward against laziness
and do their job right.

I'm not recondite,
just fed-up.
And scared.
Yes, I'm scared.
Who isn't?

My tooth shaved down
to ruins, next week it will
be covered
in gold.
For show.

My mouth, too, is an empire
whose era is coming to an end.

Nine Lives

He thought he heard his mother's voice over the telephone wire.

*

The carpet cleaner might have been better stored under lock and key.

*

Tested Theory: A cat will always land on his feet.

*

He gave it away happily to Esmeralda.

*

The wily fox sported a new fur. The intended thought she would try it on for size.

*

A bathtub, a birthday card, a cinnamon bun, a gold necklace, a hung jury.

*

All that jazz, baby. Cool cats and a howl gone wrong.

*

He'd exploited the waffle maker, his buddies insisted, with the best of intentions.

*

The white light inside the eyes shimmered across the continent and set sail for home.

Jagjit Brar

Trophy

The woods were full of danger
the mountain very tall
a sixteen-year climb
and I was near the top
when a blinded female hunter
pumped in my back a rifle shot
and counted me in those on her wall.
With help from my very best friend
she hauled right away
her prized new slay
to a taxidermy shop.
The pudgy taxidermist was blunt.
“I cannot work upon it
at least not yet
it ain't dead enough,” he said
The two merciful hearts
then dumped their kill
on my front door
and asked me to die some more.

Solitude

A hostile new storm
Is fomenting in my vicinity.
I wish to close my windows
I wish to board them up
I wish to light a lantern
And ride the storm out. What ocean will catch high winds
What boatman shall you warn
What window shall you close