

A Satisfactory Daughter

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Entering Wonderland

The mother of invention curls her finger, beckoning,
says *Come in, the door is open*. So follow
directions, uncork the bottle and slug it down.
Let the astonishment of pond frogs transformed
to footmen invite you to read a new language
in your calico's smile. Discover metaphor's
alchemy in flamingo mallets and inspect

the shattered egg of tragedy. Allow yourself
to celebrate all—from the little chipping
sparrow's trill to the stars' magnificent arias.
Just throw back your head and sing *O frabjous day!*
Calloo! Callay! It's a simple opening wide,
this business of drinking in everything,
of living in wonder.

Never-Never Land

Fourth graders are all the same, avid
as cadaver dogs to sniff out difference,
quick to sense the invisible ash on a sacrificial
forehead and mean as snakes.

But Gracella French, who bore the stigmata
of poor on her hand-me-down dresses, carried
the taint of her father's work draining cesspools,
just flitted among us: oblivious, gypsy-haired shadow.

When her invitation arrived, I cried,
but mother made me go, drove to the house
where the wind whispered *lonely* and flailed
paint to the bone, ripped petals from roses planted
in an old tractor tire there in the weed-clotted yard.
Only three of us showed. Yet when Gracella
unbowed my package of plastic barrettes,
she glowed as if I'd given her treasure.

I remember best her home's alien air,
its acrid, metallic scent stinging my nose.
That, and the lopsided chocolate cake
her mother baked from scratch, frosted
in neon green exactly the shade of the poisoned
cake Captain Hook gave Peter Pan.
Expecting death at any moment, I ate a slice
like Tinkerbelle, my small atonement.

But now I know that reason is a lie,
for as she passed our plates, Gracella's mother
paused and stroked her daughter's hair
with such hot love, such glistening pride,
I wanted to eat that too.

Break-up

She's such a fickle bitch. One minute her humid breath tickles your ear in dreams, the next, she's cooled, flitted off to who knows where, leaving you empty panned, exchanging blank stares with the page. Useless to beg, cajole, rage, or ply with pathetically wilted bouquets until your pores ooze blood. She doesn't care. Some hunky poet laureate or that woman with dandelion hair has snared her.

So just suck it up. Sharpen pencils, wash the roof, read cheap thrillers, phone your shrink, fiddle with the Sunday puzzle, eat a peach, maybe scream a little. Pretend you never needed her. Tell friends she was a lousy kisser and a slut. Then write a poem about the lovely hussy you miss so much.

The best time of day

is just on the cusp between darkness and light,
the moment night loses its grip and day gathers
itself to begin again—this instant of transition.

In this shadow hour the first thing to see
is how moonset's pewter gleam resurrects trees,
pulls the sky's cold black away from branches' living
black. And the first thing to hear is silence:
crickets, katydids cease rasp and saw, peepers stop
trilling lust songs, and the last raccoon, clever
hands sore from clanging garbage can lids,
has trundled home to rest. All creatures sleep
but you—bears in their dens, foxes curled
nose to tail in their lairs, the thrush's first
tentative chirp still moments away.

Now is the best time to rise and watch
the day's geography draw itself on the map.

On Looking into *Gray's Anatomy*

The Back

In Figure 213, the back of a man
is unskinned, muscles laid bare,
trapezius, latissimus dorsi dissected.
How lovely these intricate twinings,
smooth sheathes reaching over and up
from the spine.

I recall watching you take off your shirt
in the sun and loving the play of those muscles
as you bent from the waist,
straining to shift a boulder.

The Tongue

Seen up close the tongue is fairly
disgusting—a muscled slug,
its papillae, with taste buds embedded,
covered by a scaly epithelium
thinner than skin.

But for all its ugliness, the tongue
is exquisitely sensitive, and such fun
when it licks nipples and lips.

The Brain

Just look at the possibilities of its parts:
imagine the cerebellum tolling the hour,
a diva receiving bravos for her medulla
oblongata, Michelangelo carving a marble
Pia Mater for the Pope, or spelunkers
exploring the Fissure of Rolando while
a hippocampus lolls in the riverbank mud.
Now picture all of us writhing
lustily in a gyrus fornicatus, to fornic.
And at the end, we each become a corpus
callosum ferried to thalamus.