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Poems

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Abstract

AARON AT WORK/RAIN, ANNA MARIA IS COMING, OR MAYBE THOMAS BARTON, OR MAX!,
EVERY WAY, INSOMNIA III, TRANS

Hilda Raz

AARON AT WORK/RAIN

By the light box propped in the window,
 bare chested, scars rosy in artificial sun,
 he crouches over his workbench.
 Dental tools in their holder at hand, silver discs,
 his torch, the tiny saw. Light flares, breaks on
 his earring as he turns his head,
 frowns, dark eyebrows almost meeting.
 He takes a watch from his jeans pocket,
 rubs it absently over his beard, electricity.
 The braid clinks its beads as his head
 turns, reading something. Now he rises, goes to
 the cupboard, mixes wallpaper paste with water.
 The pile of miraculous papers, shot metal
 threaded with linen, he sorts to start
 the papier mâché hypodermic needle he's building on the table,
 matches it to the real one he used this morning,
 adds as a detail to the mask to change the meaning:
 a revolution: what he's about. Out the window the black GTI
 beads up rain. He never drives it. An emblem, but of what?
 A memory of pain, his slouching walk just home from hospital?
 Where is the child whose shoes I bought? Where the bread
 we kneaded? Where's our kitchen? Our dead?

ANNA MARIA IS COMING, OR MAYBE THOMAS BARTON, OR MAX!

New life! Will he toe out like Dolly, like John? Will her eyes be fires?
 Blue and green, like Papa's, the ocean at the shore?
 Will she sing in the bath? Play piano in her diapers?
 Will his heart leap at large machinery? Will he say, "Dribe, dribe,"
 to his daddy, entering the tunnel? Will his hair be red? Will her hair curl?
 Will her little face have the circumflex eyebrows of her mother? The
 pointed chin?
 Her hair be fair, bright blonde? Will she frown at the light by the river?
 Oh, let her head fill with Greek Owls, her mouth with honey wine.
 Let his hands cup the keys, the air of the studio filling with sound, the
 crunch of
 cornflakes, the sift of raw sugar on the tongue, the great chords.

And let the parents be fierce forever, Lord, as You are, exacting
 price and penalty for Your gifts, so they grow strong and joyous
 in their age, blessed by the memory of the black car, open to air
 and chosen by a child in token of the power they give over,
 their lives in service to new life, the great melt of petals under snow, the
 green rising.

EVERY WAY

In agony again
 in the kitchen again
 sun fills the clear feeder
 on the window my chickadee
 flies to, flies from her old barn siding
 house made by a poet
 How can
 I stand more
 transformations? Poet
 myself, transformed
 by the mind of my child's will
 into seeing at the instant of revulsion
 - O rose thou art sick -
 the miraculous change Mad
 no less than Lear raving
 on the moor without his fool.
 My flat backyard
 radiant with sunshine
 lift up that bird.
 Lord, help me to it.

INSOMNIA III

He has a tumor in his brain –
 that much we know – and he's the father
 of four children, the oldest fourteen.
 Therefore this morning of sun so bright
 we're asked to draw the shades,
 let us praise the brain in its bone pan.

All night I bow to the boom box,
 changing tapes. The electrical cord
 between my ears carries a charge
 to adjust away from the fleshy thorax,
 over the head to rest safely where it belongs,
 if it can be said to rest anywhere
 naturally, on my skull.

O disordered
 self, to require distraction all night,
 stories poured in the porch ear –
 for example, the man who counts the angel
 residue of birds broken on our picture windows –
 to obliterate the polite rustle
 the possum makes with her babes
 through the laundry yard to their home
 under the shed. And to miss at five
 exactly, this spring season,
 first bird song with first light...

O untrustworthy self
 filled with appropriate terror of tumor
 and broken wing, consider
 flight, not the swollen plague tongue
 in the sore mouth, but story.

Or the possum herself, laden, twentieth generation
 of her family, in residence still in our yard,
 how in spite of ghosts and grief
 she knows exactly – how? – her path
 under the empty clothesline.

TRANS

What do you care, she asked
 at last, letting me get the good
 from my hundred dollar therapy time.
 She's still your daughter. Whoops
 she said going red over all the parts
 I could see – face under all that permed hair
 her neck chicken-wattled, even the top part
 of her chest the V between her bowling shirt button
 (marked JAKE on the pocket) showing blush.
 I sobbed, quiet at first, swallowing salt,
 then louder wailing like some beached baby.

Son you mean, you old biddy, I croaked at last
 crying a good ten bucks worth of earth time.
 Who would have thought that little one
 whose cheek turned away from my breast
 would grow up HE. He started SHE,
 a brilliant daughter.

It's the age, she said
 not meaning puberty because he was long past,
 thirty at his last birthday, but the times: everything
 possible: hormones, surgery, way beyond unisex
 jeans at the Mall, those cute flannel button-down shirts.

What will I do I whispered so deep into misery
 I forgot she was listening and I was paying. No wonder
 I needed therapy.

Afterwards on the bluffs at the heart
 of the weirdest sunset since July 4th
 I try to conjure his voice: "Mom,
 since sunup the sky's been dark but, now we're talking,
 I see the sun come out, perfect
 for a walk and when we're through talking
 I'm going out. Come with me?"
 That voice: the same words and phrases, intonation –
 from me with his dad mixed in – "like cake with too much
 frosting," as my student said tonight in class. Be honest
 here. Love is the word he said in closing. "I love you,
 Mom." Transsexual – like life, not easy – in the 90s.
 My kid. And me in the same boat with him, mine.