

Bliss

*The woman wears the dress.
The dress wears the dress.
The dress wears the woman.*

She used to be big. She could remember walking into rooms and her self would blossom past its skin perimeters, bounce off of walls and rub against people. Her laughter rang into notes that danced down hallways and made crystal glasses shiver. At least, she thinks it was her. Her memories have been gauze-wrapped and secreted away.

You were so vibrant. So stinking sexy. Every guy wanted you. You were a force, an original, he says. How did you turn to dust, to glass splinters in the carpet, burnt crumbs that can't be shaken from the toaster?

He says those things, but he likes her this size. He can feel sorry for her and hate her now that she's small. He can slip her into his pocket and carry her with him. Sometimes, he rubs his thumb along the length of her body. Sometimes she arches her back. Sometimes he snags a hangnail on her skirt.

It's gotten so she can't see out of his pocket without jumping. The trash is full and spilling onto the floor. Dishes are crusted with egg and stacked in filmy water in the sink. She'd rather stay in his pocket's soft lining, cotton-balled. Playing solitaire.

Born/Borne

She met her sons long before they were borne of her.

The first came to her as a series of crystal matryoshka dolls - his self nestled inside his self, inside his self. His smile fragmented by his glass layers. He floated loftily near the ceilings of rooms, catching the sun as he wobbled a singular parade.

The other, she met on the bank of some muddy river she didn't recognize. It was summer and the water ran high. He kicked stones into the water and refused to show his face. She tried to turn his head toward her, but he twisted away and hunched his shoulders against her.

The streets she walks now, she once walked with them. Ghosts of their grubby hands slip in and out of her fingers, fluttering. She has learned not to grab.

She carries her self inside of herself. She was. She is. She is swaddled by lines that have been drawn in dark arcs to mark her existence. She begins and ends, chafing against some corrugated paper shell, sipping small breaths from its dusty confines.

So much of life has been spent waiting, waiting to reach milestones, events. She is waiting for a man who draws in his sleep, or a woman who gives everyone the same haircut. Someone predictable, with no end.

Good Cook

It was 1963. It was Dallas, and blood and brains and the coppery smell of anguish. Her boys played with cap guns. They killed each other daily. It was 1969. It was Vietnam and men coming home without the legs they left on. Her boys pledged allegiance daily.

She began to feed them, her boys. Fried pounds of crispy bacon, cheese-loaded omelettes. She plied them with pancakes and waffles smothered in butter. They crunched down bright bowls of Kaboom. She laced their lunch boxes with Twinkies.

Dinners were debauchments. Gleaming shanks of lamb. Roasted turkeys and slabs of beef. Biscuits and breads and rolls to sop up the blood. She gave them borderline diabetes and mild hypertension. She swelled them to sizes that were difficult to shop for. They grew uncomfortable, but dependent. Her love swelled with each pound she painted on them.

She snaps the neck bones using her thumb and pointer fingers mostly. Moves her fingers like she's singing the eensie weensie spider and the irony is all but lost on the chicken. The neck bones - that tender bit of spine - no thicker than her finger. A snap of a green bean or one of those thin breadsticks that get scraped across the butter. They would not get her babies. Not her babies. No.

Cleavage

She keeps two pairs of scissors strapped to a belt she ties around her waist. She is never without them. They slap gently against her right thigh, marking her cadence. Knit, purl, knit, purl.

One is a tiny pair, gold-plated and shaped like a stork, its beak the blades. She found them in her grandmother's sewing box, tangled in embroidery yarn. Her grandmother had been a woman muted by time, so she uses them to cut things that would have made her grandmother's breath catch in delight. She doesn't come across much that warrant their use - so they stay, shining.

The other pair she took from her mother's junk drawer - silver bladed, black handled. The kind that made her wrist bend backward with their heft. *Ronco Kitchen Shears* that promise to cut through everything with equanimity - from chicken bones to a single baby hair. These get the most use. Life is a series of brambles and pricker bushes, shin-skin pared by thorny biers. It's best to not walk through them unarmed.

Years ago, she threw away all of her knives, which were only good for stabbing and slicing. So primitive. And, she thinks, she is anything but primitive. She wonders where she would be without her scissors. They have cut her escape hatches, grand gowns, new niches. She uses them to cut her meat, her vegetables, her hair, her ties.

Today, it's winter outside. Inside, she is in love. Sitting cross-legged on the floor of her bedroom, she cuts her heart into wafer-thin slices with her grandmother's scissors, the stork's golden beak gliding - open and closed. She folds the slices into fours and snips, each intricate cut repeating into fragile snowflakes.

As the first flakes fall outside, she hangs them in her windows. Watches as the sun bleeds through.

Mothers' Milk

All she had was poison. Droplets of toxic colostrum crust over her nipples and stain her shirt. She keeps him clean so he'll be better. Better than her.

Sounds that are painful: meat sizzling over a gas fire, clatter of dropped silverware when it strikes the tile floor. An unexpected neighbor shouting at a known, or unknown, dog. Or child.

Soothing sizzle and pop when the flame licks the spoon, underside stained black from the blue of butane and oxygen. Its insides, relief that the baby is outside now. They have thick lines drawn between them and she keeps herself corralled, stomping her feet to get near him. To smell the smell of him, knowing she has placed him on the side of safety, not forgiveness. Someday, they tell her, he will understand that you did this out of a great love. A wish that he be untouched by your black undersides, your cotton fever, your lust to be free of yourself, yourselves.

Blue bottle flies bang on the window to get out, never in. She doesn't wonder if flies bruise, she knows they do. Will I die before he can remember me? Will I become that bit of grit in his eye, the smell of smoke on a fall afternoon? Will he look for me so he can kill me? Does he want to stay?
He can't say.

She flips a coin, a penny. Heads he goes, tails he stays. Heads.
She flips again.