

Impunity

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Impunity

Living is like having an allowance
with no faces on the bills.
A lot of people tell me
they are middle-aged.
How do they know?
My mother was middle aged at twenty-nine.
At fifty-seven, she clung to my arm and said,
Let's live it up, Birdie.
We'd go to Arturo's on Houston.
She'd ask the piano player in his shoddy tux
to play "The Way You Look Tonight."
I'd lean against the waist of the piano
and while I sang, Mother watched
the drunks to make sure they were listening.
Most of them weren't,
though a few glared abstractedly
at my moving mouth.
*Someday, when I'm awfully low,
when the world is cold...*
When I walk past the two bedroom apartment
I should have rented twenty years ago,
Number 17 Stuyvesant Street,
I remember my mother
asking the foreign landlord,
*Will my daughter be able
to come and go with impunity?
Come and go with what?* he said.

The Only Star You Can See from New York

Summer in April, early in this strange
new century, a restaurant in Williamsburg,
we sat at an outside table, and smoked
a cigarette. Venus winked in the hot sky
over a line of hung laundry, a necklace
of blue and green T-shirts, white boxer shorts,
a tiny training bra dangling in the center like a jewel.

It was the best cigarette I ever smoked,
the reason, in fact, that people smoke—
a perfect pause between courses—after
the octopus, before the artichoke ravioli,
after meeting, talking,
before the sweet surprise of sleeping
with someone who could be my son.
Then, like a change of scene in a play,
a woman from a window stage right
reeled the fresh clothes in.

Later, in bed, his eyes safely closed, I looked at him,
curled in his S of sleep, long neck, burst of black hair
over white white skin, an awkward, adolescent cat
who hasn't grown into his ears or arms or legs quite yet.
I lost my virginity the year Sam was born, I heard
Hey Jude, don't make it bad...walked into the woods to a cave
while the tenth graders swayed on the dance floor like bears.
Sam collects vintage shirts. Under this worn skin
my heart beats backwards.

Pie

I bought a crust at the all night Sloan's
and filled it up with apples,
cinnamon, butter and sugar,
slapped another crust upside down on top,
scored it so the apples would bubble out,
and I cooked it and felt better.

I got the recipe from my therapist
who used to feed me in the days when I was so distracted
I couldn't sleep or eat. I remember long walks
and long spiraling conversations, and the small
comfort of hugging my husband's back.

I don't think I've ever had a bad time eating pie.

When I was a kid Mother picked rhubarb
from our fence and boiled it, Grandma made key lime
and I never understood what that key meant,
and Barbara, my therapist, made apple pie
and sometimes I think she threw in nuts
for crunch and it was just what I needed,
late at night, starved from my inheritance.