

Wedded

Why can't the dog and the cat get married,
the postman to the bishop, the nurse to the queen?
In the days when mud was chocolate
we could march the egg cups down the table,
humming that universal tune.
The teddy bear and the piggy bank,
the lightbulb and the tomato.
Not all of these relationships would work out,
as we knew from the sound
of cloth tearing in another room.
Still we imagined,
in those days when peppermint was money,
that a bit of lace thrown over
the cat's spitting head would make her beautiful,
and a dropcloth would stop the parrot quarreling
with his mirror mate.
We were dizzy with weddings,
even when the books fell to the floor
inky and torn, face-down like bridesmaids
with their mascara running.
Why do the things that were sold together,
the obvious salt and pepper,
rows of rolled socks like dull neighbors,
always go missing?
So we married the glove to the mitten,
in those days when morning was bedtime,
when lunch was rice flung in the street
after the tin-can fugitives,
we matched the boot to the baby's shoe
and no guests came.

What Dora Said to Agnes

When a man falls in love with a woman in a painting,
they call it philosophy.
When a woman falls asleep with a book under her pillow,
they call it loneliness.
When a man brings a woman home from the massage parlor,
when he buys the teen runaway a donut
that she eats greedily,
shivering angry in her brother's outgrown sweater,
when on the yellowed thousandth page of a novel
the girl who was too beautiful for her neighbors
dies fully clothed in the preacher's arms,
it is not the same as when a woman imagines
gently removing Sherlock Holmes' tweed cape and hat,
coaxing Frankenstein down from the ice cliffs
with a cup of warm milk,
it is said to have nothing in common with jailhouse weddings,
the women who write of love to famous killers,
pushing themselves up against police sawhorses
as the televised glare kisses their lipstick
at the stuttering electric stroke of midnight.
When a man undresses a woman
he is unfolding a letter
he expected would be addressed to him,
when he reads it whatever memories
he brought to it he will take away again.
When a woman undresses a man
she is promising to wash him,
she is offering the hand that will close his eyes.

The Fear of Puppets and the Fear of Beautiful Women

have in common that your tongue is not your own,
is a hand reaching up through your throat,

making your plastic eyes roll a hard eight.
You have to look at whatever the hand wants,

and it wants to make them laugh, the beautiful women,
but not the way they'd laugh at a dog,

which is what you are. You are covered in fur,
the cheap kind, someone decided you should be orange

like a rug from the decade when everyone was blind,
even the beautiful women, who bred with men in sideburns

and embroidered vests, and one of their offspring was you.
You know the word *venustraphobia*.

It is not a tropical spider with delicate green legs.
The fear of beautiful women is different

from the number thirteen or crossing bridges,
though the fear of being bald is sometimes compared to it.

Beautiful women have not confided in you
about dentists, or the dark, or getting on a plane.

The fear of puppets stays in their heads.
You can still tremble unstrung. Open your mouth.

It might be your own words coming through this time.
Pupaphobia: having a fist for a windpipe,

the fist of the one who holds you on his lap.

Barbie at 50

Her little girls no longer bite their nails,
the stubby hands that undressed her
have moved on to trouser buttons.
Pink polish, bitten to the quick,
or younger still, drawn on with purple marker –
now French tips and a diamond or later
an untanned line where the ring once was.
Barbie knows the world by hands and feet.
Her own are forever arched for heels,
hot pink, one sandal and one pump.
Barbie's been buried in the sand
beside mother's toes, splayed in flip-flops,
chunky piglet barefoot girls
who dunked her in a bucket,
drew on her nipples, cut and stroked her hair.
Head down in seawater,
she could have told them that midlife nirvana
doesn't need a plane ticket.
Barbie's naked as the widows
floating in the Ganges.
She wasn't there when Ken died.
A lady of her age steers clear of most events
involving small boys and firecrackers.
Pink is the color of mourning
for Barbie, who wore it on every occasion
when there was someone to dress her.
Plump hands brush pink on lined and powdered cheeks.
Barbie is carried out in a box.
Hands turn over tags,
hunting garage-sale bargains.
Nude, she lies back on the picnic table,
points her inked-on breasts to the sky.