

Poetry Class in a Massachusetts Prison

Turner's lips twitch, his eyebrows go
crazy while he reads Jack Gilbert. I tell
Matthew to think olive, not motor, on the ooze
of oil crushed. Paulie's a skinny white guy, blond
beard, blue crocheted kufi cap, going to town
on Robert Hass's "Meditation at Lagunitas."
Which is hard to do! I ask Carl who's the "you"
in "One Art." Ben's shaking his head, erasing
all thought on John Clare. Butch just says outstanding
when I ask how he likes Gail Mazur's "Baseball."
He beams. They are men alone with poems, last day
of class in jail. Ken saying Jill I can't do this, I'm no good
with poems. And me saying Ken shut up you give me that
crap every time I give you anything to do. Ken laughs,
admits he gets the poem's loneliness, knows
what lonely's like. I broke up with my ex-girlfriend
when I caught this sentence. I roll my eyes and he gets it,
gets that he gets the poem. Last class. Goodbye,
my gentleman felons. Goodbye to their sentences, locked
cabinets of books we're not allowed to use. Goodbye
dark clothes two sizes too big. Men trying their best, their
beat-up desks. Their glasses and watches, all of us
working together, in the time we have left. Shrugging
at pages, holding their heads in tattooed, winter-dry hands.

Rosa Parks Edits Her Statement as She Writes It

"I had been pushed around ~~for~~ all my life ~~becau~~ and felt at this moment that I couldn't take it anymore. When I asked the policeman why we ~~were~~ had to be pushed around? He said he didn't know. "The law is the law. You are under arrest." ~~I acte I went will~~ I didn't resist."—handwritten note from the Rosa Parks Archive, Library of Congress

*I had been pushed around for
what? Because why? It doesn't
matter. The pushing? It's not
about her. When I asked
the policeman why we were,
we weren't. We weren't acting;
we had to be pushed around. Whether
I acted or not, went willingly
or not, it doesn't matter.
The point is, to resist all this?
Start out with I didn't resist.*

The Serious Downer

I tell Josey when she dies I am going to eat her face
before I call the cops. They'll be on their way

to pick up her dead body and I won't be able to stop, finally able
to bite adorable chunks of her perfect cheeks, gnaw on the regal

cleft of that much beloved chin. I am always already hot
to chew on Josey somehow: the side of her hand, the part

you press to frosted or fogged-up glass to make a little
baby's foot; one rough knuckle plucked up in the middle

of the day at a red light, her cool dry hand on the stick.
I tell her the EMTs for the dead, the morgue guys, will walk

in on me, her blood by now darkening and crusting
all over my mouth, me looking up like *dag, busted,*

mouth agape and also full of one last bite of her unchewed body.
But it'll be so sad; you won't be there to think it's funny,

I say. *That would be the drag,* adds Josey, nodding, complacent.
That would be the serious downer of that situation.

I Imagine The Butches' Stripper Bar

At my butches' stripper bar you can watch butches
fold laundry, iron. Objectify them while they
slowly refinish a roll-top desk, take off a trailer hitch.
They file taxes, wear waders, bake you a layer cake.
I'll lay her cake, my imagined patrons mutter. I think
of who I eroticize, how: they're always getting stuff done.
At real stripper bars the women just dance; so many things
they could be checking off their lists. I guess men don't want
to see women work? They get that at home? In my Champagne
Room the butches plant bulbs, build bookshelves, clean
basements, write checks to the ACLU, re-train
your dog. Fantastic grow the flannel plaids; they lean
and squint, lick pencils, adjust a miter box. They
make box lunches, chicken stock. The butches make your day.

Donuts in Kid-jail

Here is how often you see donuts in kid-jail: never. Zero times. Like seeing a cat or a dog, a cell phone. A white kid, a comfy chair. Just me and this one kid, same kid who wrote *Monkey Rescue* first time we worked together. He saved Junior from a fire, then they got high by the pool. I drew hearts and stars in the margins, helped spell “monkey,” wrote GREAT JOB! They gave this kid two donuts, a small carton of milk, and we wrote imitations of “One Art,” me with no breakfast yet. My stomach growled. The kid looked up, both of us remembering I have a body. That everybody gets hungry, whether or not they are free. This cracked us up, and he offered me a donut. So I said *You are a sweetheart and I am never going to eat your donut.* Which made no sense to him. *Dude, I have a car and money—I can walk out of here and buy a dozen as soon as you finish this poem.* So he kept working. An empty classroom, “One Art,” sharp pencil, still room. *What are some things you have lost?* Mother, Father, Sister. Grandmother, school, ring. Country. Bracelet. My stomach kept growling, we kept laughing, he kept offering me a donut. Donut as distraction. Donut: a gift. Finally he said *Look, I'm going to go pee. Then you can eat the donut with no one watching.* Donut as test! He left, and I said to the guard, *Hey I'm going to eat that kid's donuts real quick-like while he's gone.* And the guard was horrified, said he'd give me five bucks to not touch the kid's donuts, explained donuts are hard to come by in juvie, blah blah blah donuts. While I'm like I WAS JUST KIDDING! I WOULD NEVER MESS WITH THE PRECIOUS DONUTS! Kid came back, and we finished his draft, which he asked me to keep till next time. And I drove away, past Forest Hills and new condo construction, Blissful Monkey yoga studio, Whole Foods. Parked my car and walked into my house, where no one hurts me, where I eat whatever I want.