

The Corn Mother

1

If time could be cooled and sliced, quivering
from its jelly mold, with all our left-overs hung
randomly within, truth would be found lying heavy
at the base, fleshed out, naked, head turned,
weeping—Oh Dear!—for its own ugliness. What is it
the young man missed? what else need we know?
Beauty may be truth, but truth may be ugly,
lying cold and naked, lying wasted on the floor.

2

This year I know I will have the honored role
as the last sheaf. At last I will be the Corn
Mother, the crone, feared and reported by all.
I felt it coming. When I was running loose
over the field, a surly wind, I knew buffeting enough
to strangle the stranger's children,
those crimp-haired, black-eyed babes I had long ago
pulled from my loins, unsheathed and abandoned,
unable to name them in my gnarled disgust.

3

Now I will be left for the strong young man,
the clumsy reaper, he who has been tricked.
They will call, "He has got the Bitch!"
"He has got the Old Woman and must keep her!"
"Dolly! Dolly! Dolly!" Even though it shames him,
even though his mollusk cheeks burn a dark red,
even though, like all carters of carrion,
he will not let his eye meet your eye,
he knows he must chase me down.
The burly boy knows he must embrace me.

4

Once a sneaking child, finding a forbidden room,
 came on a large young woman, a girl, seated,
 staring at her with blank, black eyes.
 A brood shame, kept close by a small town, developing
 pearls, the girl grew daily in the child's mind.
 As her own body ripened, the girl too spread
 in womanly thigh. Both eggs cycled with the moon;
 the stalked blood in both convulsed and cooled
 like the white glint in the girl's dark eye.
 For all the old child knows, she might be there still,
 pulsing to the sun-planed, rock-cold moon.

5

My breasts hang heavy with all this bidden,
 forbidden fruit. As the rest fall and the winds push,
 wafting my top-heavy desire, I swing full
 as the first glow of coming for coming again.
 My seeds will sack me. The color of dun,
 they string the smell of the sun across
 my scrawny throat. Laughing, droll, they will call,
 "Thrash the Old Maid! Stroke the neck!" When he is done,
 they will dunk the burly boy, muddy his face,
 roll him in dung, for his own sake, and for his girl.

6

She—He—My woman's erection is a body arching
 for arrow. Together our desires dare
 for the bull's eye, secret, staring, daily death.
 But the woman not loved is not worth the loving.
 When my lover loves me not, when he shrinks from me,
 I must shrink from myself. In my ballooning meat,
 I am become a beached whale, drying, my white
 carnivorous teeth hinged for the fit of firm flesh.

7

So what in the end does the fat lady sing?
Listen to the hiss of the Corn Mother:
the old truth is a child unmoved by a mother
unmoved, is a woman unloved by a man unloved,
is a man shamed by a woman shamed, is an old
witch, strange to herself, seeking the bliss
of the chosen, seeking clips to the young,
with time's friction firing her rank sprawl.

8

Seizing me, the burly boy's strong arms *umarm* me.
He calls me "dear" as he slices my rough crutch.
Cut on the diagonal, interlocked,
my thick beads will form a faceted diadem
for the prettiest girl to cast aside, to burn.
She will remember them when she learns that beauty
may be truth, but truth, even reaped by myth,
yet sinks heavy as dust on the threshing floor.

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