

Booby Trap

There was crumbled camphor in it, lemon juice,
and God only knows what else
she siphoned into an empty bottle
of butterscotch ice cream topping.
(What irony.) On the dresser, it sat
ringed by flying cockroaches and gossamer
mosquitos, whose names we never shortened—
because *that's not how you handle evil in a house*.
The concoction was for our freshly washed
breasts and nipples, what our mother
didn't want to grow—no stray dogs
sniffing her lot. She made it
with the same hands she used to douse trash
with ammonia when she took it to the curb—
another nuisance, more evidence of having lived.
It worked on the bloated black bags and Hercules,
the neighbors' dock-tailed doberman,
but not us. Oh, she had her edicts.
We were a faithless generation.
Every night, we opened windows to get the inside
heat out, but let the outside heat in.
Meanwhile, the curtains billowed. The attic fan roared.
The air it summoned made the camphor sing.

Permissions

Let me
be small-breasted again, with bifocals
and a love for summer nights;
fan propped in the open windows,
Eden Gardens smelling like car exhaust
and dinner's fried chicken—not because
we were Black, but because leg quarters
were pennies per pound and fucking delicious.

Let me unscrew
the Strawberry Shortcake lampshade from
its mandolin, ease its base and my head
beneath the covers, pinching my nipples
as I read, stopping to peek
at the shadows they make against
the tent of sheets
with their triangular
nothings.

Let Ramona Quimby
squeeze toothpaste into the sink
for the third time since May.

Let Mrs. Piggie-Wiggle
bake snickerdoodles, which sounded a lot like
tea cakes.

Let her stage a campfire around
her chandelier, its crystal droplets
pooling on the floor of her upside-down
house.

Let Tony Miglione say at the beginning
of every chapter, “Then again, maybe
I won’t,” which I didn’t know
to call privilege—that I should have
the right to say it too.

Let the neighborhood boys
watch, let them slime the story
with their apple-puckered tongues
as they suck Blow Pops and swear
they saw me masturbating.

Let it be
the most disgusting thing
to ever happen on York Loop.

Let me fall
asleep. Let the bulb
burn a hole in the mattress.

Let my mother
find it and figure it out, brag
to her friends about my books
as she dumps cream of mushroom
into her Dorito casserole.

Let me
be well enough again
to digest cream.

Let every
dandelion crisp to blonde
in the summer’s heat.

Let my mother's straightening comb
sing just past my ear
because when she was in a good mood,
she was good like that.

Let the "green thing" which could have
killed us all be cool enough
to sit on with my play cousins in the evenings.

Let the one
with the dimples preach his first
sermon from the grass.

Let my sister ask
if it's true I was being *nasty*
because we didn't know to call it
self-love or autoeroticism,
the hand's miracle of
turning water
into
water
into—

Let
the wine
come later.

Let the men
come last.

Let them ask
to push the box fan
through my window.

Let them wait
for me to answer
before they do.