

## 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. Piggle-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.