

Margaret Diehl – Two Poems

The Aunts

According to Dante, most Catholic of poets
my father spends eternity in a cursed wood,
in the form of a gnarled tree,
harpies breaking his limbs,
which ooze human blood.

His sisters would have preferred it
if my mother had murdered him
in the garage of our New Jersey suburb
with guile and alcohol,
luring him to the purring car
while his children slept, so they could rest easy
he was in Heaven with white Jesus.

Don't tell my mother that.
She thought they liked her
even though she was a liberal Democrat
agnostic, enjoyed sex without marriage.
She thought *we can be friends*
across these cultural divides.

We didn't show her the letter arguing
their suspicions.
We let it play out...one dies, another...
now it's Mom's turn. Soon.

Others' deaths are the abyss.
I like imagining my beloveds somewhere.
My father disappeared long ago.
My own brother, a child, long ago.
How could I get them back?
Would remorseless reality bend to suit
one matchstick person?

The pages of my aunts' letter still rustle in my chest
waiting for my own death
to cease being, for the words to unhinge
from the corrupted paper.

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For decades she sent her sisters-in-law
thoughtful Christmas gifts.
Clementines, pears, pralines,
chocolate truffles. They visited now and then,
accepting her beds and whisky.
I think they like being around someone different.
We don't talk about religion.

Praise to the women across the world
who live alone in the untrodden places,
neither village nor forest,
taking lovers, talking to animals
as if to lovers, loosening the ropes around the mind.

The mob seizes them, wreathes them in flames,
snuffs their voices praising the ripe earth
and kindness that drives into loss—
taking the only road there is
and nothing, as far as we can know, after.

Submission

Sent out by themselves,
without notes in the lunch box
or bright new pennies, they no longer return
as they once did in hand-addressed

envelopes, a little dented.
That moment of knowing before knowing.
There was welcome
on the cherrywood table with its keys,
in the air, scented with coffee
and socks, typewriter ribbon.

Now an email pops in
while I'm using the bathroom
assuring me my voice is important and matters
to the community
just not this particular journal.

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My community is in bed with me
a black and white cat, curled up like a roundworm
chimes of texts from friends
my neighbor's Reggae and curry

the parts of my body that ache or burn,
drag or itch. That do violence.
Desire is lost among the paperback fiction.

The magic portal between my ears
admits the famous brooding criminals
of isolation, Theodore Kaczynski,
Rodion Raskolnikov.

Their faces float behind my eyes,
asserting likeness, though my anger is female.
I commit no crimes but daydream,
depraved-heart randomcide.

My community includes the dead
in their rusty canon, restless ghosts
both known and nameless
who descend like locusts
every seventeen seconds.

My voice matters to them.
They cluster at my throat
waiting for it to stop.

Margaret Diehl has published a chapbook of poems *it all stayed open* (Red Glass Books, 2011), two novels and a memoir (*Men*, 1989, *Me and You*, 1990 and *The Boy on the Green Bicycle*, 1999, all from Soho Press) as well as poems, short stories, and essays in literary journals, including *Kestrel*, *The Chattahoochie Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *AMP*, *Cloudbank*, *The Adirondack Review* and *Gargoyle*. She lives in New York City.