

Tina Barry

Because I am Lonely

and this is the Eighties in New York,
I place a personal ad in a newspaper, fill it
with half-truths,
anonymous yet revealing as my thumbprint.

Because they are lonely
I haul two trash bags of letters
from the newspaper's office into a taxi,
sit between their poking points,
already their girlfriend, protective of their secrets.

Because they are lonely
they audition in swirled script.
Cryptic notes in crayon. Postcards and post-its.
Quiet pages translucent
as shed skin. One cooks a perfect Spanish omelet.
Another, poses with three dachshunds, offers
a ready-made family.

Because he is lonely
a widower sends a list of everything he misses
about his wife.
I stop reading at 10 pages.

Because he is lonely
an inmate serving 30 sends a letter
that sits untouched,
as if it might explode,
or explode something inside me.

Because I am lonely
I take the letter to bed,
hold the lined paper.
In the corner
of the envelope, an old black and white,
"Me. Ten years old" scrawled at the bottom.
I run a finger along its edge, worn from handling,
stare at the boy, messy-haired and gangly
in his Sunday suit.

Because we are lonely
I cup his chin in my palm and gently
make the part.

Tina Barry is the author of *Beautiful Raft* (Big Table Publishing, 2019) and *Mall Flower* (Big Table Publishing, 2016). Tina's work appears in numerous anthologies

including *The Best Small Fictions 2020* and *2016*, *Nasty Women Poets*, and *A Constellation of Kisses*. Her poetry and fiction appear in *Drunken Boat*, *Inch Magazine*, *the Lascaux Review*, *The American Poetry Journal*, and *Yes, Poetry*. Tina is a three-time Pushcart Prize nominee and has had several Best of the Net nods. She holds an M.F.A. in creative writing from Long Island University, Brooklyn. Tina is a teaching artist at The Poetry Barn, Gemini Ink and Writers.com.