

Trio

by

Karla Huston

Ellaraine Lockie

Connie Post



The Wapshott Press

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Love That Red

The mouths of their tubes open,
luscious tongues reaching.
I'm drawn to them—the thick
color embedded and shaped,
the sheen glistening,
the slanted tips fat with promise.
My mother wore *Love That Red*
and when she put it on, I knew
she was going farther
than the clothesline
or the edge of our corner lot,
knew the way her lips pursed
that love it or not, red was her color,
the way it lit her brown eyes
and she was taking all of it with her.

My Mother, Cutting My Bangs

She steadied her hand as I sat
before her, perched on the edge
of the kitchen counter. My head
had been crammed under a faucet, a rag
held over my eyes to keep the soap
out while she sudsed, shampooed, rinsed
with the aluminum tumbler nearby.
I was rubbed and toweled, my bangs
flattened, Scotch-taped against my brow.
She came at me with scissors, sharp
as my grandmother's tongue, while she
snipped, snipped—swore, but my bangs
wouldn't comply and stay even.
They shrank from the shears, backing
away, getting shorter but no less
straight. She stepped back, sighed,
her work done for that day, at least.
My bangs, crooked and unruly
became an abstract painting against
the pale canvas of my forehead
a glimmer of the scissors-wielding
woman I, too, would someday become.

At the Curl Up and Dye

Women come early and late,
bring children or come alone,
carry pictures stripped from
magazines and handbags filled with
wrinkled tissues, pins, and bent
photos wrapped with rubber bands
and lint. They come looking
for miracles. They want curls
or not, the latest disguise,
someone to shave 15 years off
faces, hands, their sorry soap
operas. They get twisted
and clipped, then watch the rest get
brushed into piles by salon
ladies wearing gloves and cloaks
of lavender mint. Salon ladies
who'll trim their necks, pull them up
by their roots, arrange follicles
in random order. Salon ladies
who'll knead necks and knuckles,
massage temples, salve aloe
and egos under the glare
of fluorescent lilies. Today the air
fills with dread and roses, a flush
of ammonia. The women turn
in their chairs, their heads filled
with expectation and regret,
a moment of splendor before
they walk out the door.

What She'll Do for Love

Katie says she wants to
improve her writing, do
a book report for practice
or a literary analysis for fun.
I play along, flattered she's asked,
so together we flip through books,
consider ideas, till she finally blushes,
then admits this work is for a boy
who will surely flunk otherwise.
My stomach knots around my scruples.
This is cheating, I know,
but without it, he'll fail.
And she'll fail him.

Once I loved
a boy so much I'd do anything
for him—wash his hair, clip his nails.
I wrote essays for him about Hawthorne
and Shakespeare, speeches about
putting greens and modern art.
How easy it was—
the open page, his mouth repeating.
Like Katie, I hoped he'd be the servant
to my clever tongue, need my words
so much he'd never leave.

Waitress

My mother went to work each night,
apron tied in a perfect gold bow,
sensible shoes fastened to narrow feet,
hair held with a net of spit-curl and spray.
She knew how to bow and dip,
her pockets full of tips, slips filled
with chef's short hand. She cradled
silver coffee pots and trays,
delivered other people's dinner
and carted off their debris,
Mother followed orders,
shouldered even the chef's mistakes
She carried everyone's bad news,
squeezed past drunks grabbing,
their vodka knuckles just a duck
and curtsy away. While she was gone
I made Sunday supper,
tried to get everything finished
at the same time. But the potatoes
were always lumpy and thin, gravy
greasy, peas green and exploded,
all served with lettuce the color of rust
and rusty French dressing, my father's
tongue flickered red and angry
while he waited for his dinner to be served.
Even the cherry Jell-O didn't set well
when my mother was away.
I knew I wasn't good at it, my pockets

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full of impatience and dread
never knowing which I hated worse.
She, gone for the evening, or me
expected to know how to take her place.

Ellaraine Lockie

WOMANHOOD

If Women Ran the World

Hankies with holes and dried snot
hung as public assistance signs tied to a fencepost
in front of the house that bordered the railroad tracks
If wind whipped them into tumbleweeds
notches carved in hobo shorthand in the wood
advertised the community service

My mother fried Spam in bacon grease
minutes after the 5:15 screeched to a halt
The whistle having dinner-belled need for food
as dependably as the knock on the door
She squeezed the pink slices between buttered bread
that folded into recycled waxed paper
And delivered it to the man wearing whiskers
and filthy clothes waiting by the fencepost

Back then I saw it as charity
Even though Dad wore the look he did
when Mom made him go to church
The same look probably that Grandpa wore
when Grandma made pork sandwiches for
Willow Stick whenever he appeared
on his pinto at the edge of their homestead

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Grandpa said *Woman, those Indians are gonna scalp you*
She built a bartering business with the Cree anyway
Homemade lye soap and pickled pigs' feet
for chokecherries, firewood and peace of mind
Grandma knew how to hold onto her hair

In California I offer the plumber, tree trimmer
and furnace repairman
homemade cinnamon rolls and coffee
My husband wants to know why
since we're paying them

Assault and Rape the City Crime Report Says

Every morning a weight like the downward drop
on a bench press stops me when I walk by the house
that is home to two teenage daughters
This cul-de-sac that serves as small town
in the midst of metropolitan madness
How we party the holidays, barbeques, birthdays
Deliver food and comfort for death, accidents
surgeries, the flu, miscarriage, divorce

Yet we know how success of neighborliness
also hides under a certain cloak of discretion
Police abide by discretion too and bestow
only time, date, address and status of *minor*

Not one of us has a clue the right thing to do
Even the ex-child social worker who digs up
from her past the shame in young girls
when their most private part becomes public
Nor the woman among us who was once victimized
and couldn't talk about it for months
So we say nothing, do nothing
out of respect for the innocent

That weight each morning has become
a clenched fist of anger
Has become a dagger under the cloak of conscience
For continuing the cycle of stigma that has
penetrated societies since the rape of Lucretia

FAMILY

Stepping Over Arizona

1. step: a prefix denoting connection between members of a family by the remarriage of a parent and not by blood

Her father, my mother, old and as lost
as widowed roadrunners
Her sister dead, mine never born
We baby-stepped with two left feet
through the maze of remarriage
Never enough time together
for the giant steps of intimacy

2. Step up: to increase, augment or advance by one or more steps

Now we're thrown into the race of inheritance
Ours a slow plod through Depression Era compulsion
of crammed cupboards, closets and storage sheds
We breathe-in nostalgia from 9 decades of diaries
church bulletins, calendars, every letter ever received
and free logo pens as dry as Arizona sand
Exclamation points punctuate desert air
as we haul piles of apache tears and agates
Sort hundreds of boxes stuffed
with the likes of rubber bands, tuna fish cans, yogurt
cups, Popsicle sticks, toilet paper tubes, unraveled
yarns, and my mother's echo: *Waste not, want not*

Questions like *Why 42 scissors and 60-some flyswatters*
float over us like comic book speech balloons

It could all be tossed in the Goodwill truck but for
the covert layers of wedding bands, watches
and diamond rings

Navajo squash blossom necklaces, turquoise/silver
earrings, bolo ties and rings—many still wearing
price tags

*3. step by step: dealing with one thing and then another
in a fixed order*

In the kitchen, airwaves get filthy
with four-letter words
when we find maggots in jars, 2-year expired food
in the fridge, prescription bottles dated 20 years ago
and stacks of used and washed paper towels
Rags instead of toilet paper hanging
on the bathroom dispenser
Under the sink floorboard the silver dollar collection
gone missing after Grandma died
Inside the bed frame
a coffin-size compartment hiding
a lifetime stamp collection
and antiques unseen by us before

My stepsister and I fall into the same bed
each night half drunk with wine, exhaustion
and laughter too long and loud
After a week mimicking a month we wake
to the last ordeal that waits in the living room
Where heirlooms stare from a china closet
so full it strains the oak enclosed space
Every treasure assigned its beneficiary

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in my mother's handwriting
Of course no grandchild or cousin wants
what they are bequeathed
So we spend the day as auctioneers
cell-phoning photos
Invite friends and neighbors to choose from leftovers
Until the only thing standing in the forest of dead oak
is a tiny china deer with a homemade sign
that says *Homeless*

4. Step: a degree in progress or a rank in a scale

On the last day we wave good-bye to truckloads
of garbage and donations
Say hello to our mode of transportation
to Los Angeles
A U-Haul the size of a city bus with keepsakes
and eBay wannabes as passengers

My stepsister has taken only a pocketful of rocks
her family's photo albums
and her father's Marine Corp
mementos in her one suitcase
When I see the tiny deer peeking out of it
the Tom Sawyer in me wants to take her
behind the house
Prick our fingers and blend the blood

5. Step: to put or press the foot

We take turns gripping the wheel
The glare of enormity in the beast we've become
fades in the vastness of the Mojave Desert
Under the spell of Highway 40 the landscape opens

Along with our mouths in awe that we each traveled
this road when it was Route 66, The Mother Road
We confess to both being Daddy's girls
One mother as cold-blooded as the desert tortoise
we just saved from roadkill
The other mother's lifelong penchant for larceny
The rest of the skeletons freshly out of closets
shuffle their renewed lives back and forth between us

*6. Step: the difference in pitch between two notes that are
next to each other*

The metronome from highway seams plays
its hypnotic countdown that regresses us to childhood
The cab radio alternates opera and classical for her
New York City with country western for my Montana
My stepsister still dresses in tailored attire, I in fringe
and cowboy boots

We hum along and the cab
reverberates like a bipolar karaoke night
Laughter like we were Thelma and Louise
I the one with a gun, she with the good sense

*7. Step: To move or proceed as if by steps into a new
situation*

On the second morning my boot slams the brakes
as a driver passes with shouts and finger pointing
at the black plume of smoke trailing the truck
Shock that there are no brakes transforms me
into a Mojave jackrabbit in headlights
My stepsister quickens to see that she
employs the emergency brake overnight and I don't

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The slow salvation of this straight level road
and perhaps blessings from my Hopi Katsina
barrette roll us to a stop
Recovery requires time with a roadside waitress
who has heard our story from the mechanic
She asks if we're friends having an adventure
A pause long enough that the woman blushes
thinking her own thoughts about what we are

In these still and silent moments
blood loses its power to a highway
How it can be a birth canal, a Mother Road
that spawns the sticky glue bonding siblings
One that connects to a lifetime
of other roads we'll travel
We say to the waitress *We're sisters*

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I Have Always Lived Near the Water

the mosquitoes have always found me
have always brought their shrill sting
to my vanquished ears

even with thick sleeves and indecision
they found me
even with sorrow and dirty skin
they found me

they need my blood to live
but so do I
—I don't know how to tell them
I need it more than they

I don't know how to tell them
there are other things under my skin
they may not want

there are clots of futility
nights I've kept
covered by thin nets

how must it feel for a mosquito
to ingest the serum of self loathing

how must it taste to swallow
blood, still warm with wrath

how must it be

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to leave my alabaster skin,
take flight on a balmy night
searching for a place to land
full from the hunt
sated
restless

carrying nothing
but the pulsing fluid
of remorse

Water's Edge

All of the fish in the pond are dying
but I don't know why

I cannot bring myself to tell you
or even go outside

they have started the turning upwards
one eye to the sun
off, on, struggling

as if they are trying to see the rest of the world
before the end comes

It's the dance of the surface
I revisit all day, looking out the window
the pull of bitter gravity that keeps me up nights

the pull of the deep green water,
the Koi hiding, the silence and
the moon pulling, pulling

I notice the struggle — each moment
their gills beating faster
their small mouths, opening, closing
begging me to find a cure
a way into the water

as I turn over in my sleep
I see myself swimming beside them

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turning the opposite way
when the walls finds me
when all of the nocturne knows..... it is over

finally,
the pond ... my sleep
drowns inside itself
and the Koi, now gone
find me in my thoughts, later

they swim in my head
finding the edges of awareness
always prodding me to find the surface
knowing my secret
knowing all along
it was I
who was following them

Capitola

If all the seagulls suddenly perished
from this one beach
upon whose wings
would the mist fall

how would the pelicans
remember the way to shore
remember the sand crabs
or how to keep the secrets
of a sacrificial tide

too many fallen feathers
too many ways to get lost in the sand

too soon
a young girl
will find a dead bird
in the footprints of her adolescence
pull it away
from the chaos
the knotted kelp

and stand quiet
while the bird
in its death
will thank her

for wading long enough

in low tide

to let the monastery of pelicans
and swallowed fish
find her
return her
at last
where the water ends

Water Running

The sink in the bathroom
was clogged last night

I went to brush my teeth
in the kitchen

as the water ran,
I was fourteen again
toothbrush and paste in hand
scampering out to the kitchen sink

dad sleeping off
another drunken rage

a reason for us to stay
quiet, unworthy of full breath

“don’t wake him” we would whisper
between rinses

even the water seemed too noisy

I would have let my teeth go rotten
not to wake him

I would have broken my jaw
not to hear the hallway door

I learned to clean up gracefully
after my mouth had been unclean

now, years later
when I hear the water running
too loud
too long
after dark

I stop and wonder
if it is my blood running backwards

trying to tell me
it too
has forgotten which way to run

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Central Coast

"I bring you my passionate Rhyme"
W.B Yeats *"A Poet to his beloved"*

You read me Yeats
on the beach

the sand stirring
the sound of your voice
quieter than the waves
but larger than the ocean's

steps away,
the same seagull from yesterday
cleans its feathers

seeming to understand
the poet's need to
find some meaning
in the sand

all the while
at a distance
a young boy
is blowing bubbles towards us

a few melt with the salt breeze
more, dissipating as his parents
turn away

hovering

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when they reached your book
your open hands

as if to say
"I'm still here"

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Bios

Karla Huston, Wisconsin Poet Laureate (2017-2018) is the author of *A Theory of Lipstick* (Main Street Rag: 2013) as well as 8 chapbooks of poetry including *Grief Bone*, (Five-Oaks Press: 2017). Her poems, reviews and interviews have been published widely, including the 2012 *Pushcart Best of the Small Presses* anthology. She teaches poetry writing at The Mill: A Place for Writers in Appleton, Wisconsin.

Author's Statement: While I write about many subjects, inherent in many of my poems is the desire to write from voices of those without voices. My poems definitely have a feminine/ feminist slant. The poems I've collected here are poems about mothers and daughters, those historical and mythical women who have come before me. Exploring aging and sexuality for the older woman is important to me. In addition, I rely on memory as a stimulus for poems. By writing from my mother's generation, I have a greater understanding of where I am in the larger scheme of things.

Ellaraine Lockie is widely published and awarded as a poet, nonfiction book author and essayist. Her fourteenth chapbook, *Sex and Other Slapsticks*, was recently released from Presa Press. Earlier collections have won Poetry Forum's Chapbook Contest Prize, San Gabriel Valley Poetry Festival Chapbook Competition, Encircle Publications Chapbook Contest, Best Individual Poetry Collection Award from Purple Patch magazine in England, and The Aurorean's Chapbook Choice Award. She also teaches writing workshops and serves as Poetry Editor for the lifestyles magazine, LILIPOH.

Author's Statement: In preparing this short collection of poems to reflect the foci of my life, I thought about what is most important to me right now. I realized how different the list would have been in my earlier life, and no doubt how different it will be later in life. It seems the poetry we write can chronicle our lives much like a photo album does.

Connie Post's poetry has appeared in *Calyx*, *River Styx*, *Slipstream*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review* and *Verse Daily*. She has published two full length collections, *Floodwater* (Lyrebird Award) and *Prime Meridian* both from Glass Lyre Press. Her awards include the Crab Creek Review award and the Liakora Award.

Author's Statement: The theme of my poems is water. Water is part of our world, our bodies, our souls. At times there is too much water and we run and seek shelter. At other times there is not enough, and we thirst. The metaphor of its existence in our lives seems to lead to the roads of poetry, language of being quenched.

Attributions:

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LOVE THAT RED

Her Mark Calendar: Woman Made Gallery: 2008

Poetry Dispatch: 2009

An Inventory of Lost Things: Centennial Press: 2009

Your Daily Poem: 2012

A Theory of Lipstick: Main Street Rag Publishing Company: 2013

AT THE CURL UP AND DYE

Pencil Test: Cassandra Press: 2002

Flight Patterns, Winner of the 2003 Main Street Rag Chapbook Contest

WHAT SHE'LL DO FOR LOVE

Pencil Test: Cassandra Press: 2002

Flight Patterns, Winner of the 2003 Main Street Rag Chapbook Contest

Virgins on the Rocks: Parallel Press: 2004

WAITRESS

Wisconsin Writers Association www.wwa.org: Jade Ring winner 2000

CASING

Wisconsin Academy Review: Fall: 2001

Flight Patterns, Winner of the 2003 Main Street Rag Chapbook Contest

IT'S FOOLISH

Pencil Test: Cassandra Press: 2002

Flight Patterns, Winner of the 2003 Main Street Rag Chapbook Contest

HOW I REMEMBER IT

Pencil Test: Cassandra Press: 2002

Flight Patterns, Winner of the 2003 Main Street Rag Chapbook Contest

MONA LISA IMAGINES

Kalliope. 2002

Pearl: 2002 defunct

Flight Patterns, Winner of the 2003 Main Street Rag Chapbook Contest

Nanny Fanny: 2004 defunct

Virgins on the Rocks: Parallel Press. 2004

ReVerse: littleeaglereverse.blogspot.com, 2012

WEATHER GIRL

Pencil Test, chapbook: Cassandra Press: 2002

Flight Patterns, Winner of the 2003 Main Street Rag Chapbook Contest

Your Daily Poem: 2011

SUNDAY SEDUCTION

Hodge Podge Poetry (as "Water Epiphany"): 1996

The Heartlands Today: V10 Midwest Turnings

A Halo of Watchful Eyes: Wolf Angel Press: 1997

THE GODS ARGUE ABOUT SEX

Pencil Test: Cassandra Press: 2002

NIGHTMARE

Flight Patterns, Winner of the 2003 Main Street Rag Chapbook

Contest *13th Warrior Review*: issue 5

Steam Ticket: Spring: 2002

Southern Poetry Review: Winter: 1999

WINDOWS

Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts & Letters: conference booklet (as "Voyeur"): 1998

Angelflesh #13 (published as Voyeur)

The Comstock Review (published as Voyeur) 1998 Special Merit award

Pencil Test, chapbook: Cassandra Press: 2002

Flight Patterns, Winner of the 2003 Main Street Rag Chapbook Contest

Hot Summer Nights: a collection of Erotic Poetry & Prose. Inner Child Press: 2012
X-RAY VISION
Devil Blossoms #3 1999; *Cup of Poems: #7* 2004
Flight Patterns, Winner of the 2003 Main Street Rag Chapbook Contest
WHISTLING MOTHER
North Coast Review: Summer 1999; *Illya's Honey: Fall:* 2002
Flight Patterns, Winner of the 2003 Main Street Rag Chapbook Contest
Family Pictures: Poems & Photographs Celebrating Our Loved Ones:
anthology (Capitol Book Fest): 2007

Ellaraine Lockie

WOMANHOOD

If Women Ran the World, *Triplopia*
Winner of The Women of the Fur Trade Poetry Contest Nebraska
Writers Guild (with title, "Now and Then")
Assault and Rape the City Crime Report Says
Carbon Culture Review
Mother by Any Means
Catnapping with a Killer
Chiron Review

FRIENDS

In the Friendship Lab

Bacopa Literary Review

MORNING WALKS

An American Haibun, First Place winner of the Green River Writers
Poetry Contest and the San Mateo Fair Literary Poetry Awards

Ibbetson Street

Mother of Trees

Carbon Culture

POETRY

To Erato

Anthology Magazine

Poets at Any Price

Lummax

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Capitola

Monterey Poetry Review 2007

"BRIDGE COLLAPSES INTO THE MISSISSIPPI"

– **Star Tribune** – August 1, 2007

Dirty Napkin 2001

Flash Flood

Apparatus Magazine 2010

Become

Prime Meridian 2020

Torrent

Cultural Weekly 2019

Before

About Place Journal 2019

Flood Water

Comstock Review 2011

Vessel on Winter Night

Dogwood 2009

Late Night Shower

California Quarterly 2010

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