

**GIVE OVER THE HECKLER
AND EVERYONE GETS HURT**

Poems by
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For my mother and father

In the palm of one hand
Now the rain falls
From the other the grass grows
What can I tell you

Vasko Popa

PART III

Joint Operation

The woman next to me hasn't flown
in seventeen years and wonders
if she'll have time to grab her bag
in Fort Worth and check it onto Cedar Falls.
Things have changed, I say.

This reminds her of her son,
who went to college, eloped, divorced,
and now hangs wanted in the post office
for thirty thousand dollars in child support.
She asks again if she's on the right flight.

The man wearing tinted glasses
and a cowboy hat has had a cigarette
bobbing in his mouth since push back.
Those of us who have walked the aisle
to the lavatory wish he would just light up.

For Our Anniversary

Now that the flowers have dried and withered,
I will tell you that they were a re-wrapped
bouquet—severely discounted—
which allowed me to purchase
those two salmon fillets I glazed
with a bottle of maple dressing,
the crab cakes I served with a spoonful
of spicy mustard from the housewarming sampler
your mother had gifted us,
the package of pre-mixed chocolate chunk
cookie dough I baked from scratch,
and from a fundraising ballet troupe,
that banana nut votive candle
which lasted just the one night.

Social Studies

I've never been shit on by a bird. A friend, who's been shit on twice, told me it smells awful though it looks like lumpy white paint, which reminded me of Mary Catherine Gay giving an oral presentation on the Mayans in front of the entire third grade. She got so nervous her lips chuffed over her horsy teeth and she wet herself. From under her white skirt, a streamlet ran down her leg and soaked her ankle sock. Her piddle spread on stage as the blood in her face. The laughter, the loss of control was reason enough for her to cry forever.

The Dead Man in the Piano

The dead man in the piano is my father.
There is no body, only clothed air,
his raincoat, grey slacks tangled in metal wire,
eight eyelet boots dangling over the side.

Children are not allowed in this room.
Thick blue carpet clean of footprints,
standing three-way mirror in the corner,
an elephant's tusk carved and polished.
I swung it toward the wall once,
stopping just shy of my desire.

A woman dressed in sequins sits upon the bench,
her long hair sprinkled with ashes.
In between faces of gaunt music making
she scans to see if anyone is watching.
Her hands arch off the soundless keys.

A clown, of course, is practicing faces in the mirror,
tired of birthday parties and splattering paint.
This is how it goes. The baby grand's back opens and closes,
the hammers strike. The clown wants out of his day job,
and the woman, admiration from the room.

Brisas del Verde

Dog asleep
in the road
doesn't budge

for a van full
of gringos
until

abuelo
with his spade
yells and

chases its three
bent legs into
the copper grass.

*

At The Shack
Esmeralda hacks
whole chickens

with machete,
packs us
tostones

pollo asado,
no *yuca*—
too hard

she says, and offers
a bottle,
Gato Negro.

*

Near the hut
where we'll sleep
ferns and red

bromeliads
grow under
dwarf palms

in this rain
forest,
the sun

pinks, mosquitoes
swarm despite
woodstove smoke.

*

Cucaracha
pokes his head
from a crack

in the plaster,
my head-
lamp beam

scares it back,
but it drops
later

clicks across my face—
I awake
like firework.

*

I lie atop
El Yunque,
The Anvil,

skyfaced
in the road,
blue stars so

close when I drink
from the Dipper
I taste tin.