

A Sunny Place with Adequate Water

MARY BIDDINGER



Black
Lawrence
Press

For your twin sister.

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FORTUNES AND MISFORTUNES

Clearly I was getting nowhere.
I wanted to be the next Moll Flanders.

I felt not of myself, as if roads
had shifted a little. But who was feeling

me, then? Pneumonia was like an aunt
who sends you enormous shorts

with the price tag still on,
then watches you toss them into a lake.

I hated my friends and their weddings.
The cold trickle of children

from a neighborhood school turned
into a simulated knife

fight between warring factions.
My distrust of the establishment left

me somewhat prepared.
I was evacuation-prone, redheaded

and formerly adulterous, cultivated
enough to need no costume

but holiday socks and a ghost train
like in the wedding magazines

my friends suddenly began purchasing
while I was attempting sleep

and other things while standing.
Remember when your biggest worry

was where? And now it's how many
leaves will keep you alive.

COIN-OPERATED RATTLE WITHOUT A SNAKE

At my church they only handled dollars and pigeons.
I was starting to run out of revenue, or bills, or royalties.

That coo inside every baby doll manufactured in 1982?
It belonged to me. And not in the way all the soil beneath

my house belonged to me, or the way you still belong
to me, even though I no longer make the sound unless

accidental. There was no recording studio, just an acre
of wax and some dolls made of rubber with carpeting fur

pasted on top. A red brick building. Only one microphone,
but after I stepped up they packed it all away, even

the trailer filled with starlight mints. My church moved
into a trailer after the first fire. After the second fire

we moved instead. Who knew windows were flammable,
that air was only rented? My parents didn't take a penny.

It was somewhat disturbing. By 1986 they counterfeited
my coo in numerous countries, while local high schools

forced teenagers to carry my coo around as a punishment
for displaying hickeys, or licking drinking fountains.

One woman returned her baby to the maternity hospital
because its coo was nothing like mine. Somewhere

a constellation of my voice leaked out of a landfill.

My real body was not nearly as stiff, or as hollow.

AN ELM TREE WILL NEVER BE THE ONE
YOU LOVE

As a schoolgirl, all I would do was jump rope
and worry. I tried to make myself into a corner.

I reversed myself until there wasn't anything left.
The worst summer I tied little strings to all

of my edges, secured them onto something
permanent. One tornado after another. One gun

brandished in the Jewel parking lot. I belonged
to no other place than this. When the Dutch

Elm rumors started, our neighbor threw pot
after pot of boiling water on the tree in her yard.

This wasn't a preventative measure. One woman
thumped her trees daily with a rolling pin, or cut

little pieces of bark to hex. My own shards were
not planted in the transom of any public edifice.

I was forbidden to wear paisley, or hear the sound
of a harmonica. It occurred to me that things

were either out, or they were in. Only one man
in the entire allotment had been to Holland.

Nobody spoke to him, or accepted his toy clocks.
They didn't help him roll the fallen barrels back

up his driveway. We held our breath at the sight
of tulips in bloom, hems risen conspicuously high.

AND I WILL NEVER BE THE SAME

Disengaged from the root like a saint
and tumbling our way
on the undulant backbone of a sheet

stripped from somebody's bed, hung
with thumbtacks
from the library cork board. One hoped

they washed the sheet first, cigarette halos
clustered midway
between his dent and hers, the seventies,

any variety of specimens possible, some
even exotic (a love of all
items mango, apricot, fluorescent).

If anything, it made the tumbleweed
look more natural,
in the way I tell you that nobody waxed

where we now wax. It made the weed
look not intruder
or metaphor for the wandering soul

who sidles into town and impregnates
every other mattress
with bedbugs, but like just another organ

in a church like the one we all vomited in
as penitent teenagers.

The hangover invented well before the ax.

Women still smoked in the library, clouds
of Pall Mall creeping
over the great turmoil of the tumbleweed.

I did not wish that I could bring it home
in my underpants,
which was unusual. I wanted to stomp it,

uncoil the filmstrip that brought it there.
Confront the librarian
regarding certain overdue fines levied

against my account in 1979. My father's
horror at the materials
I had allegedly checked out and kept.

At that time I had no inhabitants, summer
dry and humorless.

I had one mother and a room full of other

children, and a sepia box projected upon
a daisy backdrop
until the weed rolled its way out the door.

A COIN-OPERATED PICKAX

I continued standing beneath the same tree
and I admit it. We all kept grinding

our respective pestles into the assigned
mortars, despite the lack of intrinsic beauty.

I willed the ends of my hair into a firecracker.
It was an empty firecracker that only had

light, and no sound. The tree was oblivious.
Nobody ever thought of chopping it,

and what a pity, but it never caused a stir.
I was three years old and standing on a table

in a fish market, kissing old men on the cheek.
My mother told this story every day,

recalled the special on *whatever washed in*.
The man at the counter said it with an accent

and it was so revolting that we purchased
the entire lot. They say guts are the best way

to a less anemic garden. I had what you might
call *the exact opposite of reservations*.

BURYING THE APRON

We didn't have a miniature lighthouse
or a hammer, but thankfully the things we did
have outweighed the things we didn't

such as airplane tickets and apricot jam
(none, and very little) or proper footwear, wet
patches in the yard good for growing

weeds, not people, but that's not to say
we were stunted. Every year my birthday gift
was a trip to the Christmas theme park

that contained a strange number of fires
and other threats to Santa, or the dark house
where they'd put a towel over your

mother's face and pretend to slit
her corduroys with an oversized tree saw.
And then, all that ice, everywhere....

Less than a mile from the park
there was always a girl in her front yard,
hair so transparent it was more like

water haloing her head. Some
kind of radio signal gone solid. Maybe
in a distant dimension

we were sisters. She didn't
seem to have a mother, but if they buried
her apron close enough

to the house, maybe she could
return once in a while, leave spare teeth
in a jar of honey marmalade.