

Still I hear that sizzle, see the bloom

2014

Burning: There was always burning.

Backyard: a land of derelict paint
cans, sleds in August, cracked dirt
garden gone to weed
one blacked oil drum
where yesterday's news and bits
of family life are tossed
for a brother and sister
who fight
to be the one to light
the flash and dance.

House: small flares rose
from silvered Zippos,
and libraries of matches
lit Kools and Winstons.
Ash dusted Formica and floors.
Tables had brands.
Black holes marked couch and chair.
You're too young to smoke
the children heard.

Passage: one afternoon
the boy returned from Stony's Woods
offering burnt bits and empty matchbooks
in his chalice hands.
His sister told.
Their mother flamed a match and blew
and on the boy's soft inner arm
set its still red end.
That will teach you
to play with fire.

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after Sharon Olds

Oh sharp, oh flat, oh accidental.
I sing to you now, babes, of the music
of mothering – that opera
that begins with Rock-a -Bye, but
arrives with payment due,
that breaks you in two and cries
feed me, hold me, want me.

Oh Dorian mode, diminished seventh,
oh cord never severed. Song begun
as Hope and Promise
yet with whole notes and halves
repeats and holds
already on the page
that all too soon take over.

Oh vibrato, oh theme, oh variation.
The choices regretted for lifetimes.
The rasp, the rub.
The passing on of uncle's bluster,
of father's embroidered tales.
The no truth, half truth, sneak away
stumbles on the stairs at 3 AM.
My fault, his fault, no fault.

Oh strum, oh pluck, oh blow
of piss and wipe, of never pay
attention, won't apply,
fall, hug and soothe
and say that they should do the same.
The pitched stones of *I hate you,*
you suck, you don't even love me,
but oh you still do.

Oh beat, oh lyrics, oh timing
oh shit and *atta boy*
The outlay always more than the return.
And we must ever love
though they are never what we planned,
then leave them be and hope
in twenty, forty, sixty years
to find the grace notes in the work.

a sullen snarl, black clouds hang at the horizon
your destination, a seat by the exit
waiting room, baggage claim, wind shear
there will be no security, no soft landing
your father is on life support at the other end
there will be no security, no soft landing
waiting room, baggage claim, wind shear
your destination, a seat by the exit
a sullen snarl, black clouds hang at the horizon

Beyond the Roots
a photo by Annie Poznac

2015

Here lie bleached branches, fallen bones
of what once served buds and hawks.
They reach gnarled knuckles, ivory fingers
through the brack of moss and ferns.

The artist holds they are now free
to crawl away, escape the roots
which so long bound them to this acid soil
to reach past what they've always had.

She loves these woods. Her camera paints
its moods and tales in sepia
hues of milkweed and monarch, perch and toad
that hold her fast to this northern bank.

Exposed, unmoored, free to roam
would she leaf out beyond her roots,
or like these branches, probe only undergrowth
and still not soar.

Ma, mama, mater, mammy, madre
elemental cry for the one who keeps
our first world, the breast of Survive.

His own mother, she of flint and steel,
savior of the lost, sharpener, serpent, fire
and ice, push me/pull you,
worshiped/despised, bringer of balm,
bitch of pain, alive still in ambered tales.

Mother - rhymes with smother –
they devour the placenta, eat their young.
Women become/men marry theirs –
or so they say. Hate/love. Escape/return.
their blood in your yolk.

“Not our mother,” he cries at the word
we bring of the wife who’d ferried him here,
when she could no longer carry him.
She’d cut the cord and gone on first.

Ma, mami, muter, mommy, mum.
The love that holds us before we know
The one we yearn for as we go.