

Two Poems: ‘The Goddesses of Democracy Go Out Drinking and Dancing’, ‘Josephine Habeck Kurth’

Lita Kurth

The Goddesses of Democracy Go Out Drinking and Dancing

After work, we get ready
at a small stained sink, I
scrub grime from my hands
At home, plug the gap in the window
with a rag, take a shower, pull the slow
recycled razor up my legs
with a cut and a frown
dry with a thin towel
rub in Vaseline, or lotion
one of the cheaper brands

All us musesm nymphs, and little goddesses
press Walgreens lipstick
to our lips, brush blusher across
cheekbones, a little flutter
in our hearts, holding a wand
to blacken lashes, spray cologne, pull
over our best bra, our best tight top
loop dangly earrings into holes
shove supple thighs in leggings, determined
toes in high-heeled, squeaky boots

Passing the lawn surrounding a bank
We steal red roses and put them
behind our ears
bring glory to the gritty bus
when we board old men revive
boys sneak looks at legs, mothers sigh and
younger girls in PayLess flipflops
play with plastic dolls and dream

Soon we’ll dance ecstatic
even haughty men will bow
send down the bar expensive drinks crave
numbers, glances, remarks

we're smokin', and see
desire in passing hands and eyes
waiting at the bar
for an irresistible song
sipping rum and Cokes, casting
the slowest of looks
toward used-to-bes
and just-about

Josephine Habeck Kurth

'I never woke up earlier than Ma and never stayed up later than her,'
Dad fell asleep to the whir, whir, whir of the spinning wheel
Ma making yarn from her own sheep's wool that she sheared
herself, washed, and dried and carded. In the winter, click click click
of knitting needles constructed her family's mittens, socks, and caps.

She loved the fields, her chickens and sheep, but fifteen kids
kept her indoors cooking and filling the stove with wood
Once, she cracked an egg over a sizzling pan
and out fell a chick to a broiling death. She put her apron to her face,
sat on a bench, and cried

Sometimes she made a little burnt loaf of bread— for herself.
She liked it that way—and said, 'Billy, go get me some onion tops
out of the garden.' When he returned with a fistful,
she dipped them into a glass of vinegar, buttered the fresh hot bread,
and they two ate butter bread and onion tops.
I too ate butter bread and onion tops with my father once
at our table on a cracked blue gingham oilcloth.

Ma was round as a barrel but she could run fast
chasing her kids around the table, belt in hand.
Even in formal pictures, she wore a simple dress, oxford shoes,
hair combed straight back in a ponytail or bun.

The last twenty years of her life, the only time I knew her,
she lay in a hand-cranked hospital bed in our living room
only able to move her head, not her arms, nor legs. Polio pinioned
that tireless body. I brought a bent glass straw to her lips,
she still told stories of Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox
and talked in a cracked voice to her little blue parakeet
— 'Pretty bird' in a cage on a dresser by her bed.

Author Bio

Northern Wisconsin-born **Lita Kurth** was the first in her family to attend not just college, but high school (both parents, though intelligent, had to leave school after 8th grade). Thinking a college degree alone was a ticket to prosperity, she majored in French and History. Eventually, she became a poet, novelist, and writer of creative/literary nonfiction as well as a writing teacher. Her work has been nominated several times for Pushcart Prizes and Best of the Net awards and won the Diana Woods award from Lunchticket for ‘This is the Way We Wash the Clothes,’ a piece she presented at a Working-Class Studies conference in Madison, Wisconsin. She teaches at De Anza Community College and in private workshops.