

ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION - CREATIVE WORKS AND ARTWORK

Lost Language

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A collection of poems.

Overwhelming Her

Mother was the whole house vexed foot tapping on a faded rug carrying her voice across the room to scream word-rubble on my head penetrating scalp until *You are no good* rang true as brick walls shook with rage moved up fat legs beneath a skirt about to fly she mowed down chairs thrown to four corners of the world I'd give to make her loving when she kicks the cushions at the table laid with my confusion plates piled high with disappointment every fork a two-pronged mind I want to care but cannot stand her lack of patience throws my pleading out the window shatters explanations on my head held down as she attempts to raise the roof above the attic filled with her left-over rage she's packed away compassion folded it in hate the chimney blocked with curses as I beg for love but what's the point she'll always be a door closed tight.

Swan

derived from the Indo-European root swen: to sound, to sing

Looking up. My mother. Refusing soup again. Lips tighter than the neat wound in her throat. Dark brown stoma.

Setting sun beneath soft folds of skin. She points towards the window. Light along a downy arm.

It falls onto the bed. Boys crowd near a school gate.

Danger in the way they sound. Loud as her next breath.

She smiles to show she likes their noise. More than she has made in years. Not since daddy died. Tumour or enchantment?

On that day. Weird bird. Stretched neck. She called his name.

Her voice lost all its English grace. Hard won. In grief.

She was Jamaican once again. The vowels submerged. Syllables called out for help. Repeating *God*. Speech fell.

Head back on the pillow now. Boys fade to a murmur.

Far side of the road. She wants the window open more.

Points above the bed. Drift of swans in sepia.

I know she'd like to say. Your father. Ballet of all things.

Black man in a bus conductor's uniform. Dance became his saviour
that first winter. Hire purchase screen. Reflective as a lake.

His way to bear the shock of snow and England. Offering closed
doors until an attic room. Snug as vermin roamed.

In '65. Fontyn. Swan necked. He was mesmerised. Green-eyed.

Mummy lost her voice. Arms shrieking as he waved her quiet.

Had to hear each note. Regard each *pas de deux*. Hummed
the theme the day he died. Last halting words. Story of a woman
cast beneath a magic spell. Now mummy stretches her weird neck.
Looks towards the light. I know she wants to say. Your father.

Ugly Close to Sleep

We were silenced by her old age mouth
set loose between lines gouged in cheeks
she cheered to make her children weep
though she was once demure before
truth-telling gave a breathless shape
to final days made her a lethal trap
great gaping hole of missing teeth
refusing all things false when that
was how we got through Christmas
calling her three daughters fat
aiming laughter at plump hands
as food fell back to plates her son
puffed up with his two houses caved
as we were told he wet the bed
up to the age of twelve might not be
his father's son a man she never liked

much less loved in thirty years of *haterimony*
barked a laugh to say his need for drink
grew more intense towards the end
when we believed he had reformed
her final diagnosis saw her wage war
on two siblings doubled over canes
accusing them of suffering their mother's
madness just before she ran away
we thought she had died young
I feared my turn but spared to write
this down she said I would be damned
to hell called it her new home
if I used words like *sweet* said she suffered
from dementia just because she saved
the worst for her own body named a rag
hair loose thread skin balding velvet
she was ugly close to sleep with seven
dwarves named Dirty Envy Fussy Give Me
Greedy Needy Wanty a new priest
tried to bless her in the church
she spat *You are God's fool and prayers*
are used up tissues no one understood
why lying down she cursed
the bloody ceiling as too close

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

How to cite this article: Mitchell, J. 2020. Lost Language. *Studies in the Maternal*, 13(1): 22, pp.1–5. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/sim.291>

Published: 08 December 2020

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