## After School

A tongue was roasting in the oven as I sat in her cramped, ill-styled kitchen, acolyte or lesser clerk in our weird office of the yolked-by-art, or prostrators to-I was a junior, she ten years my senior with a scarlet past (rumors so I'd heard of mob connections, dangerous affairs, attempted suicide. . . .) and two young heirs. First son rushed in football-jerseyed, darkly handsome as a fable's prince; the second, platinum, asthmatic, and too pretty, adorned himself with jewels and fooled with combs. She would have another in the oven soon and not by hubby, she'd confide. When said freckled, bespectacled husband dutifully trudged in from work, he'd greet me civilly, but her he skewered with a look. I sat caught as dour resentment pulsed between them, too virginal to know in full what such looks mean. Oh, it's time I should be getting home. . . .

Somewhere I had one, clean suburban dream unlike this sour nest I kept returning to day after day as one addicted to the soaps—some raw life, awful mess of selves, a deep unsettledness of passions barely holding behind gates. More than once, when I went over for lunch, she phoned school, claimed to be my aunt, said I was too sick to come back. And more than once, after her session with a posh, inscrutable shrink, I had to drive her to the ER for some mystery antidote. When my mother found out, she was baffled and concerned yet could not tear me away.

"Your mother is *unreal*," she'd often say.

I too saw a shrink; meds and "madness" formed our links. We'd read aloud ecstatic lines from St. Vincent Millay and our own stabs at verse, another link. That Christmas, I hand-stitched and bound a book of my best poems: typed them on premium bond and cut black cloth with red rosebuds to cover all. My gift to her who gave to me a carved Victorian mourning broach I adored at once, but saying it still needed clasp repair, she took it back. She had my book.

I never saw that pin again.

## Poppins to Plath

Love's not our calling card, and love's no oven. The wind carried me—
I come when I'm summoned.
I'm a bit more than the au pair you requested, a practically perfect nursemaid

-Why are you on the floor?

I supply my own cot.

I'll need a mirror in my room and off every second Thursday afternoon.

Is it two young children?

This flat's a wee drafty.

Have you got a window open?

No wonder you sicken.

I never let a cold catch me. We'll get along well.

Let's get the kettle on-

What is that smell?

You seem to have fallen on

Extreme Bad Luck. Humph!

I've taken your measure, and

I'm the kind who speaks her mind.

I know more than two things about balloons

and disappearances. You'll find

this balm is what you've been needing.

Now spit-spot, get up off the floor.

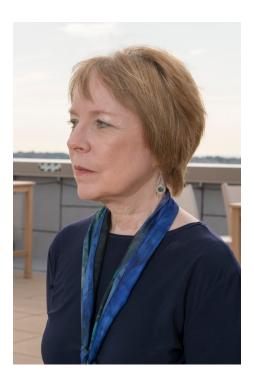
You are not a platypus.

Here's tea. Here's a spoon.

I've seen grey fog unwrapping the park,

the statues are stirring-

there's a rumor of spring!



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