

Jeanne Marie Beaumont

### 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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