Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Anita Pulier: Four Poems

Anita Pulier · Thursday, October 18th, 2018

The Butcher's Diamond

Aunt Freda got the diamond from her lover,
the butcher who refused to marry her
because his wife was in an institution.

After many ruinous years,
she left him and gave the diamond
to my mother, Ida.

Gentle Ida, who, at twenty
fell in love with Freda's brother
after seeing him raise clenched fist

from a soapbox at Brooklyn college
reciting Marxist dicta against
the unequal distribution of wealth.

Ida, a shopkeeper's daughter,
unfamiliar with jewels,
liberated the little diamond

from its ringed prison to
a thin gold necklace
looped around her neck.

At her death, I unclasped the lock,
slid it off and held it
in my clenched fist.

It had so little to recommend it,
the butcher's diamond.
And I believe

it carries Freda's disappointment
and Ida's ambivalence.
Yet, I choose to wear it daily

as even with its flaws
it sparkles when the light is right.

(First published in The Lovely Mundane)

*

Contempt of Court

The first day of Torts we read a case
of justice denied to somebody's Auntie
who fell on her ass.

A few years later I nailed
my diploma to the wall,
scattered magazines

in the waiting room, interviewed
a desperate, weeping woman
and with the intensity of a novice

adopted her angst, grasped her hand,
put on my sneakers and rushed her
to the court that had just tossed her out.

The weeping woman watched as I carved
a moment from empty space,
arguing, advocating, quoting, and citing,

until the judge cut off my lofty plea:
"Counselor," he barked,
"you cannot come into my courtroom in sneakers."

At that moment, I remembered poor dear
Auntie and understood
justice denied.

"Your Honor," I stuttered softly,
"We are here as a matter of right, not at your invitation."
The courtroom din stopped.

The weeping woman stopped.
A lifetime of seconds passed.
"Fine," the judge growled, "next time show more respect,
now get to the point."

That was the point, I thought.

(First published in Askew Poetry Journal)

*

The Art of Revision: A Lament

for my teachers

Never title your poem
    before it is written,
try switching
    the penultimate stanza
with the first or maybe the second,
    despite the urge to chat it up,
show, don’t tell,
    sure, trust your reader but
if caught
    harboring a despicable cliché,
try a robust defense, after all,
    who knows whom you might convince that this
is the One overused trite expression allowed in a lifetime,
    check if your feminine endings
outweigh
    your masculine endings,
but please,
    employ that anaphoric opening with
caution, traumatic memory
    so often dismantles
a well-intentioned metaphor when
    one singular sensation kicks off an avalanche
of unintended associations
    never dreamt of in your philosophy,
re-group, enjoy the brief respite
    and charm of your fricative consonants,
breathe relief and delight into
    the brilliant pauses
your line breaks have
    unintentionally created,
nota bene:
    trochees, anapests, dactyls, spondees,
commas, colons, em dashes,
    and, if you really must, italics,
sip your lukewarm coffee
    until you reach the dregs, then print, fold,
tuck your newly-hatched creation,
    into an overstuffed desk drawer or
wherever cracker crumbs and
    fragments of old cookies might lure
ants and flippety-winged pantry moths
    to examine
half-baked stanzas while
    indulging in a tasty nibble
to sustain their tiny selves

for the long journey to a puzzling conclusion.

*

Only Dinner

Grandma Rose’s cooking pot is too large
to have been carried in steerage from Belarus
and a few years after she arrived it was dented when
it fell off a fire escape on the Lower East Side,

still I have kept it for years
as the only heirloom from Rose.
I see it perched on the rusted tenement fire escape
cooling soup with boiled scraps of meat

waiting to feed her hungry family,
my mother Ida, the only girl child
helping in the kitchen, her brothers, much older,
out on the street, her father a day laborer, not yet home.

And Rose, exhausted, homesick,
grieving the child lost in the old country,
lifts the peeling window sash to reach the fire escape
and carry the pot inside but discovers

it has fallen to the street below,
soup splattered everywhere.
She lumbers several flights down the steep airless stairs
to reclaim her empty pot and in Yiddish mutters to herself:

it’s only dinner
we will survive.

(*First published in* Avalon Literary Review)

(Author photo by Alexis Rhone Fancher)

This entry was posted on Thursday, October 18th, 2018 at 4:20 am and is filed under Poetry
You can follow any responses to this entry through the Comments (RSS) feed. You can skip to the end and leave a response. Pinging is currently not allowed.