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Five Poems

by Sandra Kolankiewicz

A Visitation

First they should have told me what killed them. Why should I have to ask? There they were at the foot of my bed when I awoke: that fancy dress, that expensive tie with horse bridles. *Our baby's back*, I whispered though he'd been gone for years. We'd heard she married, always wondered who could have caught our bird and speculated the way some people watched *Jeopardy*. Was it when I spanked her outside of church? That time she wanted to go to the movies? Was she angry because he was always working? Maybe we gave her too much of one thing and not enough of another, now there in her Chanel suit, hair cropped, looking as if she were alive when I closed my eyes, pretended to be asleep.

My Son Becomes a Crusader

There's no place else to go; the public school is failing, scores nearly a mean below the mean. We met under fluorescent lights that sent us home with headaches, having been, and gotten, no where. We'll go Catholic, we assured ourselves, two bridges over the river now to get us there, in fact, where once, before the locks, in the height of a dry summer, settlers crossed by foot. Now water covers the fort that marked our first try at civilization, no plans for excavation, lost. We are still at the muddy bank without choices in a tired wilderness, dropping off applications, making our deposits and thinking of Saint Nicholas, his relics stolen from Jerusalem and carried back to Rome, celebrity obscuring even then.

As Long As We Both

We begin by saying
everything will be different
when those bells toll whose I am,
whose you are.

Neither may live and lie.

A girl falls off the roof,
the boys pitch eggs at cars, throw zucchini,
finally bottles at the house across the street
while you and I are swearing
we will rise above
all this.

The Franks in My Attic

They wake at dawn but then must wait till
after seven at night to tiptoe across the room

in stocking feet, after all workers in the
factory below are gone for the day but me,

who has secretly agreed to bring them water
and the soft, round bread they eat, even during

those special times they want it flat, because
anyone who would make it unleavened is

upstairs, all of them, not just the bakers, but
all the Jews in Eastern Europe who haven't

been put on a train. I bring them eggs too and,
when I can, cabbage, canned beef, a few

shriveled carrots or potatoes. They are safe
with me, in fact have made a little living room

of sorts with the battered plywood they found
stacked against the chimney and the nails and

hammer I brought in my lunch box because a
child in a uniform trusts me and admires my

bicycle. Upstairs they sleep in imitations of
cubicles at best, but everyone has the illusion

of privacy, which is important, especially
when one can't leave the lights on at night,

and one can't walk by day or pee into a metal
tub because some bored woman below, who

doesn't have enough details to type, will hear
and make the dreaded report, even though that

deaf boy she knows from across the street is
up there too, his mother pleading with me

because he's next to vanish in the van, as soon

as they finish sterilizing the others. At the top
of the hidden stairs, behind the door that looks
like a bookcase, I have every person in a
wheel chair who hasn't been taken, along with
the old men who can't find the way home
anymore, the dark and suspected, frightened
widows, beloved ancestral homes seized by
the state. Way up there in the night, five
stories above the loading dock, far removed
from the lights of the city glowing below so
the rivers seem on fire though you still can't
see the stars, the blind find things for people
in the dark, the autistic ones stop flapping,
the ones with the palsy relax, and the most
terrified know when to be quiet. Of them
all, the homosexuals and Unitarians are
undisputedly the favorites, their wit boundless,
openness notable, capacity to problem solve
and ability to improvise outstanding, to keep
us entertained and reminded to share unrivaled
in such difficult and demanding circumstances
where there are so few props, the ending
unspecified, no prospect of a chorus line.

If You Had Known Me

If you had known me before—but I wouldn't
have let you then, so it wouldn't have
mattered. All you'd have seen was the hair or
the ass. The tits were passable, especially
when I was lying down. So, now when you
see me, I wonder if you too have ceased to be
what you weren't and have become what you
are: stretched between your would-have-been
and is: tugged by gravity in some most
unsuspected places, like surety; slowly
becoming a whole other person trying to

recognize yourself, like the sudden noticing of
wrinkles on your ear lobes. Are you too left
with just a magnifying glass to view the big
picture of your life should you want to do it
with your eyes open? Close them, and what
do you have? Is it like a dream? Do you
see the green hills of an old picture, a faded
distant sure to work, or a mother trying to
feed her children? Do you find the earth
layered with forests, deserts, canyons, rivers,
irrigated fields—while you fly over them all,
high above what will turn out to be people,
side by side what will turn out to be demons,
though they haven't started in on you yet—no,
not yet—they're merely nearby while you
just watch the whole world below, and
everything happens every where at once.

Sandra Kolankiewicz's poems and stories have appeared in such places as *Mississippi Review*, *North American Review*, *Confrontation*, *Cimarron Review*, *Chaffey Review*, *Oxford Review*, *Louisville Review*, *Cortland Review*, and *WomenArts Quarterly*. *Turning Inside Out* won the Black River Prize from Black Lawrence Press. *Blue Eyes Don't Cry* won the Hackney Award for the Novel. Poems are forthcoming in *Gargoyle*, *Rhino*, *Bellingham Review*, *Solo Novo*, and *New Plains Literary Review*.

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