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FOUR POEMS BY MINDY KROMENBERG

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Film Noir

In the smoky light of movie houses
we watched glamorous hands
snap open glinting, metallic cases,
cup their hands
to light small flames,
and exhale their lines
in a well rehearsed plume.
We never saw the lipstick,
red as blood and thick as paint
smudge the tips of cigarettes,
or see the taint of ash
on the fingers of their gloves.
In the gauze of vintage MGM
the stars would glisten,
break into song or tear their hair,
tail the villain or save the children
with such grace you'd think
they were imperishable visions.
We never got to see the film
with its bad camera angles
and dead-end plot,
suspicious shadows
on fading light, the surgeon's gloves
glistening, the dark spot
burning its hole in the celluloid,
where the flickering
stops.

The Guest

In every room she enters
paint cracks on the walls
light bulbs blink and burst
like collapsing stars.
Her limbs bend
into tormented origami,
a theater of stunned statuary.

Did we invite her? someone whispers.

They worry for the trusting hands
of plants reaching from pottery.
Where's the cat? The dog?
Are the children asleep?

Every space she occupies
swells and contracts.
Family photographs
tremble on their nails,
the faces stilled in suspense.
Do we know you? they ask with their eyes.

Whose voice is it that rides the air
like a shredded ribbon
caught in a fan?
She calms, she sits, she smooths
the coiled scarf around her neck.
She checks her watch; it's almost time to go--
it's just not fair.

I'm not sure how she got here.
(Did anyone see her leave?)
The music dissolves, the crumbs
are cleared. The glaze of liquor
burns the lipstick from her glass
and disappears.

Hairline

I am startled at the thin curve
of my niece's eyebrows,
a sinuous road carved
from its innocent patch
of soft grass.

In the tiny photo taken at her school
her face is plump and powdered
but those eyes slyly narrow:
pristine windows shuttered
in spiky dark lashes.

Her mouth, bound with braces,
is just barely open: is it to hide
the silvery wires and bands
or taunt a secret admirer
with candy-scented lips?

She is an impeccable cameo, tilted face
and bared shoulders, her locket
both a heart and key,
and I wonder if she rests her hands
demurely on her knees

of if her legs can't help be bowed
to the calliope's promise of a wild ride.

The Water Tower

It stands like a spider on monstrous legs,

hovering over the highway that cuts
the Island in half, North to South.
A few summers back, a painter fell to his death
while applying an undercoat.
For weeks the tower was red in half-mast,
and police cars swarmed its base
like insects—red-eyed, nervous,
to keep out the curious.

I drive up and down this road, passing the spot
where his belt must have slipped,
where gravity played its dirty trick.
Cars were rolling back and forth
when he dipped his brush into stain.
People in a hurry, pulled to the office
or the mall, streaming by
in a pilgrimage to the beach, their ears
too full of ocean waves to hear

his body hit the ground.
The water tower, grey and silent,
watches the road. We are safe
as long as we keep moving,
past the homes with overgrown yards,
past orphaned tires and shattered glass.
I ride through its shadow without
looking back, but sometimes in my sleep
I hear the sound of his descent.

Mindy Kronenberg is an award-winning poet with over 300 poems, essays, and reviews published in the US and abroad. Her writing adventures include independent film and video. She is the author of *Dismantling the Playground*, a poetry chapbook, and is Editor-In-Chief of *Book/Mark Quarterly Review*. Ms. Kronenberg teaches writing and literature at SUNY Empire State College, runs the Babylon Arts Council's *Writers Space*, and conducts community programs for Poets & Writers and BOCES. She lives on Long Island, NY.

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