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THREE POEMS BY LISA LIKEN

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Black

When I was a child I was never allowed
to wear black. Black was reserved
for undertakers, streetwalkers
and mourners of another kind.
"Black doesn't become you,"
asserted my Mother that winter
she abandoned the garden.
No more pruning of the moonlight roses.
No more kneeling on feather pillows
to tug the clover weeds,
her slender back bowing as in prayer.

Lying on the couch she grew thin
as a stake. Leather gloves tied at the wrist,
hung from a hook with a rusting spade.

Look Ma, no hands.

Fuschia buds fell and were crushed
by hushed girls chanting
to the rhythm of a rope.

*Oh Mary Mack, Mack, Mack,
All dressed in black.*

Diamond the cat, lost her glorious white.
Cancer has an appetite.
The forearms of my brother
turned match-flame blue,
the whorish lipstick of smack.

Blue being the step before black.
Roses resurrected. They bent
to catch their breath, while the weeds
flamed up to their necks.

The Farm

Grandmother willed me her watch

with tiny cut diamonds around the face.
"Only chips," Mother said,
off the old chopping block
where Grandmother whacked the head
from Mother's favorite calf, Ferdinand.

Mother fasted for a week. Stared at the meat
on her hand-painted plate. Grandmother
said, "Eat, eat! Don't you care
there's a depression out there?" After that,
only the grandfather clock was bully enough
to make a sound.

Mother's chore, scrub the dishes,
sweep Ferdinand's fat from the plates,
take the scraps to the chickens
screaming their heads off. Mother told me
they run around until they finally run down
like a bloody wind up toy.

It runs in the family
to lose one's head.
Mother holds hers on with a slip knot
of lithium, Grandmother, a bible verse thread.
As for me - well, you know...
I find the usual masking
tape of Prozac apropos.

"Don't you care there's a depression out there?"
Even dear Grandpa had a spell.
Lost his lid selling land for nuclear plants.
Couldn't cope too well after that,
cracked up his treasured Cadillac,
then bought the farm.

Behind the Garage Door

He believes in love
he assures himself,
as the teeth of his saw
gnaw the three by five.
He's probably too romantic, damn it.
Always knows enough
to send the very best.
Why, just last week
a heart shaped box
of chocolate dipped cherries
from Safeway.
Hell, if he had his way,
they would be joined
together forever.
She bending over,
his love pillar
a permanent fixture
inside her.
Groin fused to groin
with carpenter's glue.
The type they sell
on that short spot
in the late night feature

showing a man swinging
from beneath the Golden Gate.
His only savior
is one clear drop
on the top
of his hard hat.

Lisa Liken is a counselor and instructor at Santa Ana College. Her work has been published in *Jacaranda*, *Pearl*, *Slipstream*, *Gypsy* and *Nerve Cowboy*.

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