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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.

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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.*

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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.

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## 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

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

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**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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