

CAROLINA EBEID

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*Veronicas of a Matador*

After a diagnosis, one thing  
becomes obvious: a good  
patient is a patient patient.  
I forget which is the super-  
stition. Trouble comes  
in twos? Or in threes?  
Night said: I am an ox  
drawing my harrow.  
Night said: I am a lacemaker  
with a pincushion bouquet.  
What were you expecting night to say?

\*

[*yet why not say what happened*]

My son is autistic / My son has autism  
I keep going back & forth.

Echolalia means the compulsive repetition  
of meaningless phrases. Ditto goes for rock & roll.

*Echolalia* sounds more like a concert lute.  
*Lackofempathy* could be a fern.

\*

[*graceland*]

According to the Doctrine of Signatures,  
 some herbs will reveal their cures  
 by the image they take. An earache  
 will find reprieve on a shrub  
 of spotted lobes. Toothwort  
 resembles a sack of molars extracted & strewn  
 at the base of a tree. Take liverwort  
 for the liver. Take bloodroot. If you are afraid  
 to sing in front of people, locate the field  
 mellowing with Elvis-shaped clover & graze.

\*

[*imago*]

Adulthood has come to feel rather  
 like a mantle, a sudden soft  
 cambric weight, over the shoulders  
*weave in, weave in, my hardy*  
*life.* Mine is light & listless,

I sleep on the underside  
 of a leaf. And I am daily heaved  
 out of my chrysalis to brush  
 clean the fictive wings.

\*

[*what are years*]

I recited poems to calm the boy to sleep.  
 He used to trundle about the house  
 with a line from Marianne Moore  
 in his mouth on repeat: *satisfaction*,  
 he'd blurt out, *is a lowly thing, satisfaction*  
*is a lowly thing*, & I'd reply, yes  
*how pure a thing is joy*, & it was satisfaction  
 he felt talking those words aloud  
 he'd memorized, that's how persons  
 behave, they go in & out of rooms  
 speaking words to one another,  
 in & out of doors, with words like hello  
 hello alfresco, hello you grassy inquiries  
 I have the greenest replies.

\*

[*word play*]

The boy rhymes shadow to meadow.

What does *fear* rhyme with? *Here*.  
 What does *there* rhyme with? *Mare*.  
 How about *sweater*? *Water*.  
 What does *alone* rhyme with? *A phone*.  
 What does *story* rhyme with? *Glory*.

\*

*When did it dawn on you that your child was autistic?*

It wasn't dawning; it was dusking on us, always dusking.

*What was it like to discover your child has autism?*

Other parents use figurative phrases that express a single, painful blow to the body: "like being bashed in the face with a bat," "like being hit by a train." For me, there was no bat or train. There was the photonegative.

The future presented itself like celluloid strips of negatives in a shoebox. Brightness & shadows became inverted, walking through my future city. The street lamps would radiate dark cones of light, & the sidewalk trees in front of row houses would be frosted in a negative-white.

*How would you describe a typical day with an autistic child?*

I no longer search for a future in shoeboxes.

\*

*[through a glass, darkly]*

My friend, the baker,  
insists we are dark to ourselves.  
Even in the aisles of lighting  
fixtures suspended from the ceiling,  
even among the carmine-dawn  
azaleas, we are in the dark, looking  
at our many breeds of darknesses.

\*

*[of the nimble turn of the head]*

It gives me an unmistakable joy  
to see my baker friend snap apart  
a knob of dough then flour it again.  
I think of faraway hail spraying  
on lakewater. There should be  
a word for the kind of handsome  
incorporation this is.

\*

When I fell in  
love, I spoke

as a child &  
dressed as a child.

I developed a peculiar  
inclination to pilfer guest soaps  
molded into pinecones or robins' eggs  
or little race cars. I lifted a lavender  
heart, not the form inside  
your ribcage—if I could just peer in  
as through a glass, I'd say yours  
looks like something from the sea.

\*

*[letter to the Corinthians]*

But my most  
magnificent  
self, she runs  
through a grass,  
larkly.