

## Poems by Tonya Eberhard

### Silver Plate

Historiographies prove your mental instabilities  
are still relevant,  
from 1932 to the year of two-thousand and something.

I heard you on the BBC in 1961  
from the other side of my radio in winter 2013.  
The voice did not match the face.

Your Electra Complex is  
an Otto, a boom, boom.  
Was God or Thor ever there?

How many men did you have to  
eat to feel full?  
A handful?  
A mouthful?  
Several bowls of man-stuffed caviar?

I am not your double  
but  
we gave men and boys  
the power to transform our spirits  
to dizzying heights of a Ferris wheel,  
up, down, up, down, up.

Putting them on a pedestal that  
destined disappointment, we earned  
reserved seats on the wheel of life,  
births and rebirths, our continual sufferings.

You turned yellow roses into  
upturned petals in a trashcan.  
I cherished white roses, named them *la rosa blanca* and  
wanted nothing more than to save them from eventual death.

I cannot deny screaming matches of hatred  
against my mother or halfhearted attempts  
to pull a Virginia Woolf  
but

(Stanza break)

is it possible to appreciate the poetry and  
not the poet?

Your writing is a divine nature with a faceless voice so  
strong it strikes me deaf—

But I do not want to be another you.

## Variations in the Hippocampus

The future is as real as fiction.  
Is the past certainly set in stone?

### *Recollection I.*

They reconciled after the argument. The woman picked up the lit candle stick and kissed him on the cheek. She was not beautiful but he blushed scarlet apples. She ascended the stairs, lifting the edges of her dress flirtatiously. He followed her. They stopped and blew out the candle together, a synchronized birthday wish sent out to the cosmos.

### *Recollection II.*

They did not make amends. Reluctantly, she stooped down to kiss him. He bit into her chin, leaving a mark of Dracula. She was startled and stark beautiful. She felt the wet blood with her slender finger, then snuffed the candle out into darkness. Even when they blindly crawled under the sheets he was not sorry. But his heart took a turn as he heard her audible nightmares, and cradled her like a child.

### *Recollection III.*

They did not reconcile because there was no argument. The woman picked up the lit candle and kissed him on the forehead. She was neither pretty or unattractive but he blushed red cherries. He followed her up the stairs. During the night he towered over her in her nightmare, a relit candle in his iron grasp.

### *Recollection IV.*

I cannot remember.

The past is as real as fiction.  
Is the future certainly set in stone?

## When Does School Start for You?

There were these autumns where  
none of them knew themselves,

a time when boys began to turn their heads  
at the sounds of any girl's laugh.

Before physical education in the locker room:  
Girls bragging about their budding breasts being

able to fill sexy bras from *Victoria's Secret*. They  
tallied their menstrual cycles on black chalkboards.

Kissing while holding hands was second base and  
a date to the movies was certain matrimony.

English class taught them life began with a  
subject, slowed with a predicate, stopped with a period.

Pupils were skeptical and no longer believed it, their

frustrations shown through bite marks in wooden pencils  
and meeting the teacher's grammar questions

with a defiant collective silence, like the obstinate sufferings  
of bruised apples left for September's frost.

## Farm

In the dwelling of the spirits.

Spirits that lay out milk bottles at dawn  
for the cats to tip over, lap up with their sandpaper tongues.

In the pasture they herd the cows with  
phantom hands, voices that crack like whips.

At night they hide out in the cornfields,  
parading the garden scarecrow up and down the rows.  
The crows ascend into the sky, a fluctuating black ribbon.

The immigrants see the ghosts gliding about trees with  
no hands or feet, making branches shiver,  
red apples quiver and fall.

*'Ghost'* they whisper.

They see them dancing with dead harvesters  
on All Hallow's Eve under the moonlight.

The spirits play tricks. They kill warmth,  
extinguish each hearth on the coldest nights,  
call on frost to curl the edges of leaves.

They steal farmers' daughters and wives,  
beckoning with a bone finger into the cornfields,  
offering sweet poisoned cider.

*'Ghost'* they whisper again,  
before holding the breath as they pass the cornfields,  
clutching their rosaries.

*'Ghost'*

## Your Name is a Palindrome

Getting brand new Roxy flip-flops muddy  
was the first argument.  
“Baby.” You hissed as I paused  
at the muddy trail to the wood.  
Somehow we reconciled in a matter of minutes  
under a flimsy umbrella in the rain,  
as we walked to the gas station to buy  
candy bars. At home you gave me a  
pair of jeans—the first of many hand-downs.  
I put them on, disappointed to find they fell,  
baggy against my nonexistent hips.  
I was a baby, not even close to maturity.

You were of something else and there was  
no intention of being memorable friends.

Snowstorms in the winter—  
The wood was an active snow globe.  
Our bodies were turned upside-down  
going off jumps, bums sore from the  
slaps of toboggan wood. On New Years  
Eve we skidded back up the frosty hill,  
clutching each other’s waists as we  
slid across ice. You knew the wood  
like the back of your hand, every  
permeated frost and snapped twig. So  
I followed the map you shared between us.

I envied your pale skin and blue eyes,  
your developed body. You were like a  
fairy and I tried convincing you fairies  
did exist, practicing Wicca in your  
backyard—of fire and dirt and mud and  
snow. The fairies? You already were one.

Rides to the library (when we read like  
Victorians), luncheons at downtown  
restaurants and dinners at your house. No  
one minded I never made the sign of the cross  
after mouthing the words to Grace.

(stanza break)

Over summers there were  
swimming pools where I learned  
I could drown and resurface. Ice  
cream with waffle cones, sleepovers  
with talks till sunrise. We swapped  
Tamora Pierce books, pictures of Jensen  
Ackles and Jared Padeleki. We even swapped  
dreams. We talked for hours about boys over  
land-line phones.

When I got older I borrowed your dresses  
but was not a fairy. I was not you. We try  
and try to make things right but we cannot  
make amends for being what we are.

A 2010 October birthday organized in your honor.  
We try to make amends for everything—  
A 2012 February birthday you gave so selflessly  
with purple and zebra streamers and flowers....

Thunderstorms on prom night—  
Bad boys make bad boyfriends but  
healthy relationships secretly crave  
doomed romantic encounters—  
A fairy with ripped wings.

“Babycakes.”

You would say to soothe me  
whenever I was in tears. You knew  
me like the back of your hand, so I followed  
the path on the map your finger traced.

Baby, baby,  
now as your belly swells  
fetus emerging as child  
with your face and name.

Your name is a palindrome.  
Forever backwards and forwards—  
the same.

what they didn't teach us about puberty in health class

When we were young we flipped through old American Girl catalogues well past midnight. We took turns on your parents bathroom scale, and you were jealous of me being ten pounds lighter. You matured physically long before I did, and I was envious.

Now your younger sister's pregnant. But your mother was so strict! When we ran off into the woods to play Laura Ingalls Wilder (I was Laura, you were Mary). We were scolded for dirtying our clean clothes. She never allowed eating in-between meals. At the dinner table she made me try baked beans even though I knew I wouldn't like them. She threatened to separate us during Sunday Mass and did when we quietly snickered at the priest's booming incantations. She wouldn't let us listen to songs with the words *damn* in them. But we did anyway.

Now your sister's pregnant. And you dyed your hair blonde. I see pictures of you in slinky crop tops and short shorts. Many times I heard talk about you and boys and which ones you let finger you.

You matured much faster physically than I did. Now your sister's pregnant. Is your mother just as strict?



## A Letter to the Psychiatrist

You gave me a prescription, crumpled sheet of blue  
as if I came to you with outstretched arms,  
upturned palms, asking. Blessed with an  
apathetic good luck as I left. Good luck is not  
a good charm. And Holden Caulfield  
would agree—it all sounds terrible.

One pill two pill red pill blue pill.  
Some make me said, others oh so glad.  
Rhyming is an art form never done well,  
poetry cannot do it any better.

Many swallows, but no hearty meals.  
When water rushes down my throat I see  
a beautiful Shalott, I see an  
Ophelia sleeping beside water lilies.

And I would ask your pardon for my silent suffering-  
but only the psychologist can grant that.

All She Wants for Christmas Is—

On the string of Christmas lights,  
green bulb is strategically placed inside  
the plastic, hollow Santa ornament,  
turning his complexion a ghastly green.  
Staring at him from the edge of the bed,  
stomach pains undulating through her  
like black waves filled with jagged glass.  
Oh mama, mama it hurts so much. Coconut  
lime lotion rubbed on her belly, the mutterings  
of some incantation to the Christian deity  
for a magical cure. When she dozed the  
mother turned to go, unplugging the lights  
on the tree, Santa beard now white, not green.  
But she muttered Oh mama, don't go, it hurts.  
It hurts so much. If only she said I love you.  
I love you so much. She groaned, wondering  
if Santa would bring good health in a shiny  
red box wrapped with a white bow. The girl,  
the only one that got the illness on the  
family, the evergreen tree, crowned with  
a sparkling star full of promise.