

Ruth Panofsky

The Moment of Goldfish

i

It took five years
to arrive at the moment of goldfish
and now he is proud
keeper of two
who rely on him
for nourishment
and care

This
is my child's simple yearning:
to nurture
two beings
smaller
and weaker
than himself

ii

Here you stand
taller than my breasts
arms reaching up
to grasp my head
in an insistent embrace

You are unyielding
in this combined show
of strength and devotion
for the woman
who bore you
unaware then
that my own show of strength
would soon be matched
by a boy
released into life
gasping for milk
and for breath

iii

He moulds
moist clay
smooths
the rough exterior
refines and shapes
a small bowl

In this
his first work
in clay
he seeks perfection
already lost
to his six-year-old
world

iv

I am not the same
since the doctor
called to say
your son
has Tourette Syndrome
since then
I see things
differently
distorted by a sharp
twitch here
a random
jerk there

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sound now springs
from my throat at
odd moments
when speaking with
my boss
or reading
to the children
I catch myself
click click clicking
and recall that
I'm not the one
with Tourette
but that no longer
seems true

v

Buoyed gently
in my womb
a boy nestled
unaware
as the sweeping hand
of god
was lured down
downward
to touch
ever so softly
here
and *here*
shaping the unmistakable
identity
of those chosen
and marked

vi

Cast adrift
I float through days
that once were substantial
abruptly
I start and shift
uncertain now
in thought and movement

as the ground moulders
underfoot
my spirit unmoored
by the practiced grip of illness
determined to possess
my boy
and my will

vii

I recoil
into a self
wholly altered
by my son's
implacable sickness
determined
to thwart my attempt
at perfect mothering

The pain
is acute
on darkest days
when his
marked
imperfection
disheartens me
so

viii

I mourn my lost child
a fresh-faced boy of four
torn from me
by an illness
that too soon claimed
his flesh
as hostage
to an unholy visitor
that defies his
sweet determination
to be himself
to simply
be

ix

I have been shaped
by the *b b b*
caught in my son's throat
fluttering eyes
pounding clap of hands
and frenetic bursts
of boundless energy
signals of anxiety
that overwhelm us
son and mother both
shackled
by a disease
that taunts human effort
to overcome
its merciless hold
on our days
and our lives

x

When each morning
forces my reacquaintance
with an unnatural power
the morbid
dominatrix
that possesses my son
I retaliate with poems

Against a formidable foe
I wield my pen
and with each line
subdue the enemy
within my boy
for the briefest
of seconds
minutes
hours