
In 2015, Little Balkans Press published her first book of poetry, *While the Kettle’s On*. Melissa and her husband, Marc, live in Pittsburg with their dog and several chickens.

**The Dead**

I wished dead the girl who told me
in third grade I was adopted. I’d believed her
over my dad. Four years later,
her family’s car ran a stop sign
and a semi blew into their backseat.

I picture her at a table with my father,
a new Adam’s apple plugging
the hole cancer made. They don’t talk
about the town. They don’t talk about me.
The dead don’t remember.

I like to think he has a dreamlike idea of me,
and she of her father. At the table,
she pours tea. He tucks
the lace cloth into his shirt. They’re together
because isn’t that nicer than sitting alone.

**Ode to Washing Dishes**

First, make sure your sink is under a window.
Look outside while you fill the basin. If daytime,
don’t scrutinize your lawn. Do laugh
at quarreling birds or your own yawning dog.
If night, be kind to your reflection.
Appreciate your long arms that disappear
at the wrists and the wrinkles at your mouth.

Don’t think of this task as another in a hundred.
It is the reward when those are done,
the chocolate mousse after steamed vegetables.
If the hot water and bubbles,
the lavender smell, the wine glass
to your left and soft terrycloth
against your bare shoulder are not a comfort
in this late hour, then you are doing it all wrong.

**Summer Wedding**

*Midwestern Bride* advised drying
my bridal bouquet—tying the stems
to a hanger and letting
the sunflower heads dangle.

But I couldn’t watch
vibrant colors drain like blood
from the face of a dying man.
I couldn’t intentionally harden
each petal into crumble
at the slightest touch. Instead,

I parked my car across the street from
my father’s grave and sidestepped
the 5:00 traffic. I said nothing and left
my flowers to dry under the Kansas sun.
Good Housekeeping

I.
The mother of my childhood
is propped up by the vacuum handle.
Her arms disappear at the ends
into filmy sink water.
She scrubs the kitchen floor the hard way,
sponge instead of mop. She’s tired.

She won’t stop
my father’s cancer from sweeping
through our tidy lives,
but she is armed
with spray bottles and paper towels.

II.
My father’s smoking
transformed the bathroom vent
from flute smooth to caked fireplace ash.
I pictured his lungs changing texture,
his heart no longer a red flame
but the doused black matchstick.

I tried hiding his cigarettes.
He always found them. Eventually,
I learned the joy my mother took in controlling
what could be. I polished the vent
with a pretty white cloth,
tenderly as she did her collection of tea spoons.

Instructions for a Day Game

Eat two hot dogs instead of one when
someone else is buying; take five-minute naps
between innings three and six.

Ketchup wins the animated condiment race,
and someone proposes on the JumboTron
while everyone yells “Say no!”

Appreciate extra innings; they mean free baseball
and 34,000 rally towels circling the air.

Forget possible metaphors—
the glove swoops from out of nowhere
like a shark’s fin,
bases are the stages of life or foreplay,
’tis better to have swung and missed—

none of that is important.
The closer should come out
while everyone sings his theme song,
and your team should win
at the bottom of the eleventh.

See final poem on next page
Emily Dickinson in 2012

I.
The DVR is at capacity again, this time due to a Jane Austen marathon. I like Alan Rickman’s Colonel Brandon, the way he carries a dripping wet Kate Winslet to safety. Some nights I’d like to sink into the chest and arms of a man, especially if he just happened to appear in my doorway the moment my fingers began their expert work at the pianoforte. No happy hour. No match.com. No goodhearted Dad coercing me to the market to meet his best stock boy, Paul.

II.
I eat lunch in my cubicle with a book so I won’t accidentally meet eyes with a well-meaning co-worker. Last time that happened, Linda whisked me into the break room where for weeks I couldn’t get out of my head the smell of Tom in accounting belching his Dr. Pepper breath into the air next to mine as I tried to eat my salad or, at the counter where Kevin in marketing was making a sandwich, the sound of mayonnaise slapping onto cold cuts like a hand across a bare ass.

III.
After my parents have gone to sleep, I open my laptop with the fanfare of removing a tarp from a Porsche. I am a pianist when I type these keys. Some nights I compose six or seven masterpieces.

Around two or three a.m.
I print my newest collection of poems, fold them up like love letters I’ll never send, place them gently into the hope chest at the foot of my bed.

Then I close each document without saving a single one.

All poetry on these pages
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