

MiPo~Print

The PJ Nights Interview



Trench Coats & French Toast

We blow smoke signals across
your rusty Delta 88
in exhaled tokens of winter air.
Frost fingers creep up my
bare legs and crystallize curls
wet with morning sweat.

Smells of slung hash leak from
the chrome diner. My coat echoes
caresses as I sashay past
regulars on silver swivel stools.
Smudged mascara and
puffy lips - a jukebox mocks,
swallows my two-bits
for an Elvis serenade.

We thaw with gulps of French toast
and steam over chipped mugs.
Trapped in my trench coat,
tributaries of sweat join
in rivers between my breasts,
pool my belly button only to spill
over in a rush to join musky
reminders of you; your x-ray leer
adds the burn to my cheeks.

It seemed the thing to do, darling,
wanting to stay clothed in little
but you. Take me home, please,
peel me from my wrapper.
Lay me back in tangled sheets
surely cool now in our absence.

~ PJ Nights 2001.

Your poems evoke the senses. You bring ingredients from your kitchen at times and turn the poem into an erotic experience. Tell us what inspires you to write about cooking.

My mother never let me cook at her house. I was too messy I guess. She always baked during the holidays, pans and pans of things that would stay on our unheated porch until she could slice them up and pack them into tins as Christmas presents. One year she was in the hospital during the time she'd normally bake, so I took over the tradition. I'd no clue what to do with a cookbook - my experience with recipes was with the chemistry set my dad gave me (I could blow up things in the basement but not in the kitchen.) I loved it and the tins were wonderful, but I still couldn't cook many practical things (candy canes and molasses taffy aren't very nourishing).

When I finally had my own kitchen, I used to call her up all the time - how long to boil an egg? How long to cook a chicken? But it was freedom, a step in being self-sufficient and I got over the raw fried chicken mishaps, etc.

When I moved to Montserrat, the grocery stores lacked the things you took for granted in America so I learned to make my own breads (tortillas, english muffins, fresh loaves each day) and incorporated local ingredients like soursop, christophenes, breadfruit, plantains, guavas, etc into my cooking. It was like painting for me - being the master of creation of anything is heady.

Writing poetry has the same kind of rush, hence the mix.

You seem to brew spells as well. Tell us about “*Forgetting my manners*”.



*I'm in love with words
- when I discovered
poetry beyond the few
poets (Victorian) I'd
read in my only
college English class,
my god, I was hooked.
I've read all my life;
I've no idea how I missed out on poetry.*

*My new word in this poem
(Forgetting my manners) was grimalkin:*

- 1. A cat, especially an old female cat.*
- 2. An old woman considered to be ill-tempered.*

*Ha, what a fun word to play with in a poem
where I was writing about letting go, forgetting
politeness. I remember my ex-boyfriend's
grandma - vitriolic but you had to get a kick
from her strength and her forceful diatribes on
worldly and family issues.*

*“grimalkin:
A cat, especially an
old female cat.”*

Forgetting my manners

In henna-tipped breasts
I'm abstracted, merciless
even in the embodiment of mercy.
I plunge you blind into the copper
blackness of feline eyes

behind a pince-nez - a whisker twitch -
beware the grimalkin I'll become!

The urbanity of my love for you
drops off the edge of hunger,
a cat's bell tied to the tail
of the soft-sunged vireo
who'd warble warnings.

No polite tating of lace
in drawing rooms, but the toss
of the final veil,
cellos blowing gypsy winds
through the fine hairs on your arms
your legs, belly and below -

snail trails of saliva leave you
content to lie away days
in rumpled sheets as the edge
of us fades into sepia.

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Have you written a poem about your children and if so which one?

Before I really thought of myself as 'a person who writes poetry', I did a silly thing, animal sounds and rhyme illustrated in watercolors, for my son. I had it laminated and bound - both kids still read the book. I wish I'd done the same for my daughter. But for her, one night, I was sleepless and so was she - I jumped out of bed with a lullaby in mind and practiced it on her for hours. She still knows all the words.

Last year I wrote this poem for my son, "Fishing in Jackman, Maine" which ended with "Now you are eight and still we've not returned" but amazingly, that was the year I did go back to Jackman. My son caught twelve trout with his grandfather's help. Parts of this poem were over Mitchell's head, but I was amazed at his reaction to the whole thing - he started writing poetry at school and we had our own little poetry forum.

For Sydney, after a mommy and daughter slumber party, a little one but from my heart:

a heart's full

all these things so lovely
a nebula in blue and orange
behind white Saturn

my daughter's legs
tight around my waist
her blue eyes mirthful

tonight, she and I
beneath a handstitched quilt.



Fishing in Jackman, Maine

A spring and you just stirred from slumber;
your first trip up north spent cradled
in my womb. At the end of May, trees barely
clothed in green crowded Alder Brook.

There'd be no fishing from their namesake's
bank - unruly branches played cat's cradle
with the lines we cast. In sun exaggerated
by loitering rain drops, the cremation

of the wretched day before. A tent floor
two inches under water, exile to the pick-up
with old Dawg for company and eau de wet fur
and maggoty squirrel - all drowned then

in my wade downstream. Preferring sneakers
to hip boots, through their soles I kept my toes
on the water's pulse - an odd percussive
compliment to baby kicks and somersaults.

Tucking bobber and worm behind a rock,
tempting trout from their aerated cocktail,
my father's joy was making sure I caught my limit.
He thought of you, too, the grandchild

whose smile would flash at a fish on your hook,
protecting you even then with his hand
on my arm, less sure than I of my footing.
Now you are eight and still we've not returned,

in the daily frenzy, my father's guiding hand
forgotten. He'd always find time for fishing.

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What would you
like your children to
remember most
about you?

*I don't know, even the
question makes me cry. It's
not what they'd remember
about me that matters, but
how they approach the
world. I wish for their
openness and wonder and
acceptance and most of all,
joy in the beauty of the
smallest and largest things.*

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MiPo-Print ~ The PJ Nights Interview

So Much in Five Worlds & Five Suns

I. Earth

"Watch out for ocelots," her big sister warned. "They eat bad girls."
Angela shivered and watched the lizards leave their shadows for lazy wallows in puddles of sun. In postured bravado they stuck out flicking tongues at the tiny tigrelo, and the little girl just knew the cat had bigger dinner plans.

a circle
'round the sun is broken

II. Fire

As a baby, Angela would gurgle to pinkie toes, little aliens to chase when learning to walk, guardian angels of dark crib nights. As she grew, her chubby feet ran after her sister in a game of "monkey see, monkey do" and she no longer heard the wisdom of toes.

a circle
'round the sun is broken

III. Air

Her sister knew so much! Useful things like how to use a Lite-Brite®, how to make friends with cucumber cool, how to hoodwink parents into thinking she could do no wrong. Waving her arms Angela yelled, "Have you seen MY polka?", but she could never still an impious tongue, never be the sacrificial lamb, and her world shrunk to a room of candle flames and lava lamps.

a circle
'round the sun is broken

IV. Water

She pounded out piano recitals for one, rants in E minor denying her wish for prom dresses in iridescent feathers, for birthday gifts of turquoise and gold. Angela dressed instead in humble rushes, thumbing her freckled nose at the world, a goddess of garbage drowning in her own unnoticed tears.

a circle
'round the sun is broken

V. Rock

Angela lay breathing quietly as the fifth world was born into darkness. She took up her pen and whispered poetry through gloom, teased tinder to a bonfire into which she fed her dress of reeds. In the fifth world, Nanautzin's immolation lit the sky. Now she traces with her finger

a circle
'round the sun unbroken

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