

Two Poems
By Diane Hueter

When Annie Oakley Came to Town

Pa pulled the bone from the steaming roast,
jabbed and poked at the round grey eye
until a gelatinous ball shivered on his plate,
slippery with broth. He swallowed the marrow
without a word, just as soundlessly
as he beat me every day.
I never found new eggs in the yard,
my churning never turned to butter,
my stockings wouldn't stay up, my braids flew like birds.

Our town's band— trumpet, tuba, violin,
booming and blooping and whining,
inept as a pig-tailed girl, led her parade. But oh!
Her golden pony cantered in the center of the street.
Her tiny, black-faced dog, his tongue
peeking from his lips, like a sly, silly clown,
trotted proudly behind.

Ma loved sweets, corn fritters shiny with grease,
drenched in syrup, kernels popping from the batter
like surprised babies. And she loved blueberry pies,
browned crusts shimmering through butter and sugar.
The juice stained her teeth and spotted
the white lace ruffle on her breast.
Every morning she braided my hair, wrenching it tight as rope,
muttering over her frills, *Be quiet hold still no whimpering from you missy*

I saw her ride through our town
on her dancing pony, its tail ribbon-braided.
Silver bells on the bridle, music so sweet,
surely it reached the angels on high.
Her dog leapt to her lap. How she laughed
as it licked her lips, nose, and cheeks!

My plate— always muddied by beans
and chicken hearts and gizzards.
I'd cut them in half, then in half again, peer into the chambers.
I was so hungry I ate rooms and rooms—
stairs and windows and doors,
candles and rocking chairs,

quilts and guitars, ribbons and radios,
pianos and chamber pots and dolls.
I hid inside with my eyes behind my fingers.

When Annie Oakley came to town,
to my town, she waved
to my family, to my neighbors,
to the store, the jail, and the school,
to the dogs and cats, the horses and cows,
to everyone and everything,
finding somehow even the empty shadow
that stood beside them.

Between my fingers I see
the fringe from her glove flows,
wheat in the wind, the beads on her vest
shine like cherries.

Before the sun sets, for her last act,
to the amazement of almost all,
she aims her rifle, shoots a sweet red apple
right off her wee dog's head.
Anyone can see he loves her
and he is not afraid.

Two Women Talking on a Winter Morning

A pearl grey car stalled
catty wampus in the street.

The policeman cruising by
waits to see if it can get going again,

while the snow-crueted school bus lets down
the handicap track for two coatless boys in wheelchairs.

I'm sitting this one out—trapped in my driveway,
morning coffee steams the inside of my windshield.

I run the wipers with fluid,
scraping off last night's runnels

of bird droppings. I love the birds, even the black

grackles, but especially the cardinal

calling “pretty boy, pretty boy.” I see my breath,
I see two women, neighbors down the street

standing on a brown and dormant lawn.
One wears a blue house dress with pink roses large as hands

clapping in the wind. Her short hair grey as concrete
and curly as clouds. The other woman wears a black coat,

patternless and belted. On her way to work,
her car idles in the driveway, pluming past the leafless trees.

Her white hair pinned in a bun—
I see little tendrils coming loose, framing

her head like dandelion fluff or eider down.
Together, their breath comes out, ribbons

linking them as surely as hands on shoulders.
I don’t believe they are talking about the crisp morning air,

the newspaper boy, the moon,
dogs that bark and whimper all night.

They look into each other’s eyes
as if the world was not twirling busily around them

ricocheting past in yellow buses and red or ebony wings
or indeed as if they recognized its erratic path

and knew they had to be
the steady calm center of it all.