

"Words' Worth" Poetry Readings

Poets at the Culture, Arts, and Parks Committee of the Seattle City Council.

Safer than LSD by Kelly Riggle Hower

Pooped, I lie on the couch, boneless
as a cat, home from substitute teaching.
Today I saw that guy the middle school kids call
The Mullet for his Randy Johnson 'do
Subbing is the perfect job for a woman like me,
a little excitement fix from time to time. Safer than LSD
but I'm guessing just as wild.
They come into the room 25 at a time just before
the bell, beautiful, mysterious, and sometimes even
dangerous.
Then 40 minutes to microwave my lunch and I'm ready
for the afternoon.
Sometimes a student stands at my elbow. He tells me I remind him
of the lady with the cat car. She tells me I taught her to write
a poem.
I watch them uncurl, each a fresh leaf, brand new and perfect.
Then home to reheat the burrito casserole for my family
and to tell my ten year old daughter --
who wants to be a middle schooler when she grows up--
the story of my day
I give her the skinny, the fat, the all of it, starting with
"Once upon a time at NOMS...

Fatu's Cooking by Kelly Riggle Hower

My neighbor skims milk in moonlight,
her babies sleep to her laugh.
An old Pa cries "Women and Snakes!" at us
but my Fula girlgriend only charms rice
from husk in her palm-weave basket.
I eat from her plate, I eat from
her hand, with dab
of cow butter beside. We sit half the night
on my Peace Corps chop box
while moon glides over
milk

Mortar and pestle,
calabash,
ashes from the fire.
I see that I will
come to you again
if only in pieces.

O, Fatu, Moonface,
Moon with a pail on your head

I will shed the skin we wore together
and wake up wearing it
elsewhere.

Lost Boys in Almost Town by Kelly Riggle Hower

The car is open-topped but old, convertible
a misleading word for a car open more like a rusty can
in the parking lot at White Center Public Health.
Inside the oxidized red of the car,
two darked-haired boys sleep, flushed-cheeked,
mouths tilted ajar, faces gathering the pattern
of beaded seat covers. they are sixteen, maybe
seventeen, waiting for a girl inside
to get her Depo shot or magic pack of pills.
The blackberry-wild-rose-city-edge hills break through
the tarmac, adding their slashes anding their color to murals splashed
at the clinic doorway, Native-American inspired, funded
by King County one summer to occupy the local
rambling youth in wishful summer camp efforts
to beautify White Center, Tukwila, SeaTac, Des Moines.
The girl leaves the clinic, joins them, they laugh
and nestle in the car. She's the sister of one,
the girlfriend of the other. Thistle-voiced, husky-toned
she begins to tell them the story of her visit.
They listen as if to bedtime tale. Dusk leans in
close to the three of them, Wendy talking the lost boys
into sleep. They could be waitng for Peter Pan.
Will he claim them, raise them in their wreck of a car,
stuck like a barnacle with all the little, delinquent
near-towns clinging to the sides of I-5?
The Interstate flies like a Pirate Ship into the sky.

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