

The Front Page

It doesn't balance. My components
are heavy at night.
Their sum is weightier than the whole.
Here, with the light put out, heaving
and spinning with the shut-eye likenesses
Of those who would betray us,
I would say my sister sense is lacking.
I speak for them all
and we hurtle together
towards our photo call.

If I could stop the movement, take
a closer look, I could catalogue them, the traitors.
I saw points of light last week
in the dark fluorescent maggots wriggled
in at the edge of the eye sockets.
And that face, the one of the wife shut
in the attic, and another,
the dark one underground. Yesterday
there was a school uniform, no face at all.
All are variations on a weighty theme
and would be seen as omens if I could stop to look.

But sometimes there is sun and an open window,
the mirror is clean and I think not lying.
The horse's face is trying to look in
(although I heard a gunshot and saw
some falling blood, it was a dream.
That much is sure.) To surprise it
I try to take its photograph, but there
is too much light, I think some of it
got in the camera and the tiny horse
crawls out through the lens like a maggot from the skull.

*Gentlemen, you are the professionals, bring
your cameras and follow me. She who lives
in the coal cellar, you'll never
even see her. She is black
from the dust and longs to be white.
She is naked and dark and there is no light.
You might catch the glint of her
breasts or her thighs on film. It's not
the sort of thing you'd want to put
on the Front Page. I betray
just by speaking of her.*

*The one who rides the horse,
you can photograph her as you please, if you
aren't carrying a gun. She will let the wind
swish her mane and throw her head
to catch the sun, white on her throat.
Beyond the corn she will stand against the sky,
stamp her foot and pat
her horse's neck for the gentlemen of the press.*

*The one in school uniform you had better
be careful of. She was split open
yesterday and is mistrustful of men;
for that she turns her face away
from cameras, folds her limbs and grows
very quietly out of her clothes.*

*You'll find all you need up
in the attic. To eat, that is,
and someone to serve it.
She is well fed and would like
to give birth again but has forgotten how.
There is light enough up there for a snapshot —
don't ask her for matches,
they are forbidden her.*

*

Sisters, before we enter the grounds
I should warn you that some of us
will be hounded as lunatics: those
who have been trampled by horses, lived
below ground, been bisected or force-fed
may find it ironic. Now the pressmen
are out of hearing
I am numerate and have points to make:

Firstly. In the dark a thigh
is simply a limb, you cannot see it
or decide upon its shape.
It is only white when there is light
to colour it, smooth when there is
call for a perfect finish on the print.
There is much to be said for the dark.

Secondly. Living at the top
of the house the view is fine
but when a lock is involved
the only way down is to jump.
Such a stunt will call for
a conflagration and, remember,
you are allowed no matches. Besides,
the pressmen will always applaud
the spectacular, snapping pictures for
The Front Page, the caption:
Girl, No-net Crazy Plunge.

*

Thirdly. Whether
your horse falls to a gunshot
or you are thrown, it is the same.
Once you've left the saddle
you are never as swift across the corn again
and the wind through your hair will only
prickle your scalp. It was the horse
they wanted against the sun;

you, they would rather
shoot under artificial light.

Fourthly. Your uniform is frankly
unsuitable for this operation.
The skirt is too short
and the sweater too tight. It detracts
from seriousness of our purpose
and will attract the cameras and the captions.
It is no excuse to say
that all your other clothes
are bloodsoaked. You're a grown girl
and should know about bleeding.

*

Now that each of you knows a little
about the nature of our venture
you may choose your own
route across the park, once over the fence.
Be especially careful when you are near
the buildings. The ones without cameras who
do voluntary work with the insane
are in the bushes ready with the hypodermics;
do not doubt that they will use them
or you will surely be shot to sleep
before the night is out.

And when the light dawns with the day
if you are still in the grounds,
if you find yourself waking
on the wet grass,
if you are green and sappy with the spring
you may feel that you never want to
return to the house with the stables and the attic,
the cellar and the schoolroom. But I

shall be there to take you back.
They are all somehow photographers
and once snapped by the press, short of
turning maggot, the only way for you
to get out through the aperture
is via the Front Page. It's hardly
surprising that, paper-thin,
it doesn't balance.

There is not one of you that does not need
to move, but sisters, we must move at night.