

Jancis Andrews / THE BLOOD-TIE

Something is wrong here.
Did we not dress correctly for the ceremony?
The people are staring.
Our faces are starched and folded into neat white triangles
And we wear them conspicuously.
Oh my little sister,
I think it must be that red pulp you hide in your hand.
It quivers like an aborted embryo.
Shall we rub salt into its little face?
Is it a conscience?
Let us swallow it quickly like a biscuit!
Let us go all the way and rip the legs off a kitten!
Let us gulp from its stumps and get bloody, bloody drunk —
Let us slit open the chest and memorize the systole and diastole
of the heart,
Then you and I can each force a curious arm down the other's throat
And attempt to discover the same movement within ourselves!
Our mother's coffin glides into the oven.
It is eager to go, see how swiftly it moves forward.
I think she is anxious to get away from us.
Her face was locked against me when I looked down on her:
The eyelids nailed down tight;
Her mouth closed and bolted in my face.
I think they told her about us.
That is why they put her best shoes upon her feet,
So that she could run away as soon as we weren't looking.
And yet I was sincere when I held before her this urgent telegram:

“Mother, even though you bequeathed me tumours,
It grieves me to see you packed into this fancy box —
The interior moulded to keep you tidy, the paper sheet —
There is more —
During my ninth year,
When you were busy re-reading your women’s magazines,
Father amused himself
By hammering a spike of steel down through the top of my head.
It scraped my brain and cut my tongue off at the root,
So that I could not speak,
I could only signal with my eyes.
I waved my hands frantically in your face, pointing to my eyes,
But you fixed your stare upon my mouth, my mouth, mother.”
But I do not know if she believed me.
Under the sheet I saw her fists were clenched.
Now the fire will suck her.
It will roll her around its tongue,
Smear her flesh over the roof of its mouth,
Spit the bones out sideways.
Afterward we will poke among the ashes
Fearful that something may have escaped.
An eye, maybe, the whites rearing, the iris a cold burning green
Tidal wave, raging over our halting explanations;
The pupil dilating, dragging us underneath.
I tell you I am uneasy. Let us leave here immediately.
The church is breathing heavily.
I fear it is preparing to say something about us,
Something that will shock the congregation.
They will rise, screeching, and flap after us.
See, even now the priest
Cocks his head at us sideways,
His eye gleaming and alert, his beak honed, ready to strike.
His claw has paused at a passage in the bible.
He is far too intelligent. Let us slip away!

The trees along the avenue are whispering behind raised hands.
The pavement glitters. It lights us up from underneath.
There is nowhere safe for us.

Here in the house
Our mother's belongings still lounge about the furniture:
A dress flopped out on a bed;
Her slippers relaxed and comfortable on a shelf.
I may have to put up notices.
Yet when I try to tidy up the bedding,
The sheets tremble and will not lie corner to corner.
I think my hands frighten them. I think they recognize me.
My fingers are the metal keys of cash registers,
Crude and rattling through a brutal downward slam,
Bursting open the cash drawer
The cards exploding
SOLD!

Here,
In my bag I keep several suitable facial expressions.
Take one, and put it on.
Now we are twins. Now we cannot tell which is which.
Now we can explain innocence to one another.
And now, since we have mislaid the lamp,
And since the time is come, my little sister,
Let us turn up our jugular veins till they burn blue —
Let us put razor blades between our fingers
And stroke each other
To sleep