



Mia Sara, a film and television actress for many frenetic years has finally found her form, in poetry. Her work has been published, or is forthcoming in, *Pembroke Magazine*, *poemmemoirstory*, *Superstition Review*, *The Write Room*, *Forge*, *Helix*, *PANK*, and *Cultural Weekly*, among others, and she is a regular contributor to *PANK's* blog. She lives in Los Angeles and New York City with her husband, Brian Henson, and her children, Dash and Millie.

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Don't Knock Worst 'Till You Try It

As if time was a sausage

I could salt away-

Or drape like a garland

in links,

across my uncured desire,

to cure my unmet joy,

to meet my incurable fate.

Mid-Life with Gorilla

poems

by

Mia Sara

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Persephone at Gelson's

Not quite trusting myself
with the newborn year
knowing now what I didn't know
about inevitable disappointment,
I linger in the aisles at Gelson's Market
where that sexy young guy in produce
winks at me, tossing me a pomegranate,
and that's when it hits me:

not all fruit is bitter at the seed.

Expectation

Let me carry,
just once more,
the promise
of nothing. Love,

the impossible
orphan. False Labor
bearing false fruit.
Only trust is lost.

Doppelganger,
like the stolen child,
and the taste of wax.
The first bite

of pie, I've shaped,
and baked, then
kept too long
refrigerated.

Always the same,
and never less terrible.
How it has spoiled,
wasted, all the sap of me.

For my children, and my husband; the will, and the way.

Thanks to PANK for having me, and most of all, Sheila Squillante.

My Birthday Suit

It's a risky business, dressing myself.

Naked, I am least exposed.

I was built from the outside in,
swaddled early in soft, fibrous love
grafted onto my raw bones in tight stitches,
so I could bear myself upright.

Now, it's difficult.

Every morning, I find my seams have gaped.
When I walk from my bed to the toilet,
the burlesque clatter of beads dogs my steps. I leak
a trail of sequins from between my thighs,
attracting the crows.

I am turning inside out.

I can reach inside and finger
the soft, wet nap of my life,
and digging deeper into my disgorged trunk,
pull a rag of lace, bitten by my bile
into delicate patterns, to hold up to the light.

My skin is nothing,
I am turning inside out.

I cannot find the dress that was my mother.
Whipcord pleated habit.

The hobbling platform boots that were my father's shoulders
have lost a silver buckle.
A carnival panic rises
from the folds of my true nature

Santa Saves Los Angeles

The Santa Ana winds
desiccate good cheer.
Old roots and memories
once freeze dried,
lose their sap,
withering the prospects
of our Christmas tree.

The needles fall,
not one by one, but
in steady showers.

What a fragrant corpse.
This Santa Claus
is parched,
as the virgin birth,
as stockings filled
with lumps of coal.

No flimsy gadget
from Amazon Prime
can make glad my heart
without a miracle:

One sacred relic found-
The cookie dough Santa
My husband made as a boy,

Half eaten.

I still want the shot. Proof I was here, standing on the solid earth,
dry beneath my callused feet. I want a lifeboat, a lodestar,

a shiny brass compass. Can I navigate by ape, the way back
home from school?

I shift my weight, and spot her. Low to the ground,
hobbling. Panting. On knuckles and knees, pausing,
she rears up, beats her chest, roaring.

tangled at my feet, in intestinal shreds,

My skin is nothing.

I can't get everything back inside,
and I cannot leave without it;
I will have to put it on,
all of it.

Lost In Brooklyn, Found

Moonrise on the East River.

Under the bridge on a pile of rubble,
we pass the bottle.
Spring-fevered, wiseacred,
Brooklyn kids,

Tit-flashing Manhattan.

That bench on the Promenade,
thighs wound tight
around the first empty promise,
mistaking my depth,
for the wisdom of steel.

Always in over my head.

At seventeen going on forty,
on the cracked vinyl seat
of a rudderless yellow cab,
crossing over, crossing out
the last of my name,

running, with my feet still wet.

Thirty years of rust I walked,
on a hot day last August,
back across that bridge,
neck deep in tourists
taking selfies at the guardrails

where I dropkicked my childhood.

Mid-Life with Gorilla

At the annual Halloween parade for grades K-6, camera poised,
in the glare of what passes for Autumn in Southern California,
waiting for my daughter, in her gorilla suit, to round the corner,

when that come-hither mommy, the one with four-children-
and-counting, sidles up behind me to whisper in my ear,
You'll miss this one day, as I am squinting into the sun,
neck sweating, feet itching, thinking,

But what if I don't?

What if I am stuck here at the corner of Moorpark and Elmer,
nodding my head, smiling. Trying not to worry about my girl,
in all that synthetic fur, passing out from heat stroke? Trying not
to feel annoyed with how long this is taking. Trying not to think
about what I might have been doing, had I not been here, exposed.

And If I don't miss this, have I missed the boat? I was living
life at sea level, but now, the water's rising. Where's that
ivory tower, now that I could use it? Now that youth and beauty,
and other rough devotions, are sinking, along with yesterday's
missing homework and the Kodak moment?

Is this the middle, or the end of the beginning?
The beginning of the end of the glad-handing?
The diapers, and bloodstains, and crayons, melted
at the bottom of the bag? The time before the time
you have to remember the things you didn't
even know you wanted?

Have I left my gorilla too long in the sun?

Embrace

The rose window, obscured with scaffolding, the sun,
more August than April, beaming down on the Church
of St. Vincent Ferrer on Lexington and 66th, firing
up the stained glass walls, casting those gathered
in candy colored halleluiahs. On my right, my husband
in his bright blue suit. I am holding his left hand, rubbing

the muscle between forefinger and thumb. I am trying
not to look at the enlarged photo, resting on an easel,
before a stepped wooden platform, of my mother in law,
taken this past thanksgiving, grinning through her glasses,
soft round shoulders draped in a scarf that was a gift
from my daughter, exotic floral, on white silk, bordered in black.

A sanctuary crowded with Easter lilies beginning to curl
at their edges. I am trying not to dwell on the black metal
box, the size of a shoebox, holding her remains. Instead

I am thinking about my husband's body. His broad shoulders,
the narrow hips, long skinny legs, all upholstered in a satin hide,
pale as milk so quick to burn, and his hands, skilled like his
mother's in animating the inanimate, and how I never thanked
her for this gift. This gift that lives on my skin, this gift that even
now, makes me a sinner. Because I am greedy and lustful, proud
he is mine and no "our fathers," no benedictions, no stale biscuit
dunked in strong wine can ease my mind from ashes to ashes, dust
to disease, and the Stations of the Cross winking on the sidelines,

and how we seek shelter in walls of glass. I seek the apple that fell
from the tree. I seek the coin through a hole in my pocket. I seek
revenge on this faulty design, an antidote to the unbent coil.

Now a carousel spins by the ruins
where I swapped my truth for dare.
Artisanal breeders of heritage hope
graft bistros and bike paths
onto dark cobbled wasteland,

picnicking over the stomping ground.

Call it Dumbo,
for getting the bends.
Lost in Brooklyn, found,
submerged, sunk deep--
the Bedlam where my bones were made,
and the tower they lie beneath.

Reality and the Rhino

--for K.K.J. with apologies

I am worried about the fact that yesterday when
I Googled a certain poet and found an image, plain,
white-haired, middle aged, I decided I wouldn't
like her before I'd read any poem she'd ever written.

And if this who I've become, then my recent obsession
with "The Real Housewives of New York City,"
may not be a sign of the Apocalypse, but a sign that
I am reverting to type, and should stop pretending

at depth and just paddle along the slick shallow end
of the wading pool with those wives in their
over-stuffed, vanilla, Park Avenue apartments, with their
dinky dogs and drivers, and the occasional drunken brawl

to tangle up our Bergdorf blow-outs. Because, why not?
Except for the charity. All 'The Housewives' have it.
Can't throw a fundraiser in a penthouse, townhouse, or
converted flophouse without it. Then it's all about charity

parity, who-gave-what-to-whom in the bowl. For the checks.
In the big glass box, ninety stories up and over the island
of Manhattan. And if you like stories, this is the place to be
because in reality, it's only got seventy-two. Stories

that is. But ninety sounds so much better when you're breaking
the sound barrier just to get a drink and a dry canapé.
Charity is thirsty work but coming up short? That's my kinda
party. Why do I long for the glamorous lie, the chummy

luxury of ignorance, when I know that today,

Buyer's Remorse

I ordered it, this stark white box.

I called it, and so it came.
Over seas, through air, shuttled
up hill in the back of a van.

I could say it's a bag of onions,
or a small haunch of veal,
maybe even a Thanksgiving turkey,
but, I know better.

I put my ear to its walls. The dummy
leather gives nothing away,
Its wide maw muzzled with tape.

I wonder if it hurts.
I wonder if it's mine at all.

The shape is familiar, but the name
escapes me, like waking up to find
that sleeping stranger in your bed.

Do I feed it, fuck it, or eat it whole?

Devour the evidence of my transgression.
But what if this is it, the phantom limb,
curled like a kitten in crinkly black tissue?

Has it ached for me too? Will it still fit?
Will it be angry, having come so far
in a dark box? Maybe it will bite my nose.

I paid for it, so it must belong to me.

Stop worrying about everything.
We're not family. There is no "we."

There is you, and there is me.
I ask nothing. I need nothing.

I don't even want to know your name.

or tomorrow, someone who calls me their mother
will go out for a walk and bag themselves a wounded rhino,
who will think nothing of charging through the kitchen,

goring bystanders and 'Real Housewives alike,'
in their royal blue satin Louboutin pumps, straight
through their limited edition camel crocodile Birkin bags?
And when this day arrives, will I open my mouth to soothe

the savage creature of misspent youth? To find the phrase
to ease the narcotic plague of first-ever love? Or will I choke
on the charity I refused to swallow, the dreams I let wither
along with my face, and the time after time I have tried and

failed and failed, but still made the coffee, packed the lunches,
drove to the school with claws retracted, made nicey-nice as
the taste of blood filled my mouth? Because this poet
waiting on the other side, with her barefaced, excellent poems,

understands about reality. How it won't be denied. How
the blister you get from a five-inch stiletto bursts the same
as the one you get from crawling on your knees, praying
for deliverance and the strength to accept the charity

for yourself, and for 'The Real Housewives,' who really love
their dinky dogs, and fear getting old, and still need the paycheck.
And charity for the rhino, who was shielding
her kids when she was shot in the ass.

Who will sit all night at the foot of the bed, with greying
hair, and unfilled wrinkles, in comfortable shoes, and forgive us
the fact that we're only young once, that if we get lucky
we can have even this, this plain, unglamorous reality,

this unvarnished glory that waits for us all.

In The Bag

Tote. Clutch. Sling a strap
Across my body.

Fill the void with slick
Apotheosis.

It's a supple shame
A fine-grained havoc

I'm unable to contain.
When I think

I've got a handle

On this skin addiction,

I lose my grip--

I get carried away.

If It Fits

There's a kiss on my instep
from the one that got away.
I can lift your spirits
at least five inches.

I'm always the perfect fit.
I know how to hold you,
how to pinch you, just so.

The pain of all the wasted years,
I'll banish it
to your left pinky toe.

Tired of repeating yourself?
I'll hear you the first time.
The thrust of my stiletto
will never let you down.

Give me a try. It's that easy.

You fear you've failed your kids.
The meter's run out on your face.
Forget about the opportunities lost.
My last came first. I am never too late.

Give me the crux of you,
so wasted on those big ideals.
I'll give you a purpose. Stand upright.

I am the muscle of your dreams,
let me grip you tight.