



Jelly Bucket

[jel-ee buhk-it]-noun

1. archaic slang for a lunch pail, formerly used by coal miners and other laborers residing in Appalachia.
2. Bluegrass Writers Studio's annual graduate-student-produced literary journal.

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jelly bucket

for reading



KRISTINA ERNY: THE MOTHER POEMS

As Kristina Erny notes, being a mother is complicated. She states, "Mothering, and also parenting, is simultaneously exhilarating and defeating, complicated, strange, and joyous, but also exhausting, and thankless, while also being fun." With three small children of her own before the age of 30, she knows the responsibility can be overwhelming:

[With] the daily tasks of feeding, changing, playing . . . I felt guilty that I didn't enjoy it more, guilty that I was missing out, how quickly time was passing. I often felt like a failure for wanting more than just life as a mother . . . I was and have always been reticent to abandon my other identities, as teacher, poet, wife, friend, and beyond.

Kristina's graceful, unsentimental reflections on her "duplicious nature as a mother" in this volume of *Jelly Bucket* are skillfully varied in form, tone, and style. Most are borne from loss. "The Mother of All Mothers" shares the aftermath of a child's death, the painful activity of dealing with the mobiles, the toys, the crib that will not be used as intended. "The Mother," inspired by Gwendolyn Brooks, opens hauntingly: "I, small. You, wind. Ghost children, damp and luscious." "Letter from the Mother" begins with the simple phrase, "The snore of our child / hinges the afternoon" and recounts the mundane events that never seem to end like "sweeping food from the floors" and noting "stickers adhered madly to the wall." She notes:

Now that [my children] are a bit older, it is becoming more enjoyable, but not less complicated. The management of these other lives which are also, miraculously and inexplicably, separate from mine, is a privilege. I've found it to be more enjoyable and interesting the older my children get because watching them become independent and autonomous is exciting and dumbfounding, a posture I enjoy. I am often awed by their own selfhood, separate from mine. I have been really inspired by poets and writers like Gwendolyn Brooks and Maggie Smith, Ada Limón and Lauren Groff, like Lia Purpura and essayist Eula Biss who write

about mothering in complicated nuance, just like the complicated nature of all things fully human. There is love, yes, but there is also fear, days of frustration, and loss. It seems to me mothering is mostly about loss: loss of self, loss of control, loss of life, potential for loss, fear of loss. What I always wanted to avoid is sentimentality, which I hope these poems are able to do. [My poems are] always a work in progress and I find poetry to be an open field for exploring my own duplicious nature as a mother.

We are pleased now to share Kristina Erny's poems on motherhood.

The Mother of All Mothers

i.
Her magnolia heart
on a branch. White still,
still and folded tight.
Shh, spring, you heard her,
she is up nights. She is
pacing. She hates
your yellow, your white-
white. She comes face-out
each morning, and there
you are. Branch, you are
singing. And it slaps,
it stings You are yellow
like a memorial.
Your twig just so green.

ii.
Perfect egg. An asher's ash,
the shell intact, just
small-crack, lighted back.
Back-lit, makes strong the
silhouette stored in-
side. Yolk sac a shade
darker, till bone strict
delineates the
life from the life source.
Shell dividend: an
oval on its tip
stronger than its side.
From story's data,
fragile home: i.e., a harsh
exterior. This is obvious. We
all have a shell skin,
but permeable.

iii.
Bark on the tree is
particular to
tender. Her baby,
not mine. Green-fragile,
solid as a fact.
The baby dead last
year. She mourns; she grieves.
She sews mobiles, plays
with rearranging,
folding. Move chair, move
crib. Move toy, fold, fold,
fold, wash again. Make at
normal, but she will never
be able, she will try to
stitch back to her
self that normal boy.

iv.
You are this story. You
are this story. You greet her, night,
sorrow in your heart. Neon sign
reflected in the windowpane
makes you want to cry. A you from
yesterday, you cry. Tomorrow,
you will cry too. No use,
the sad feeling just
perpetuates, makes
a graph of sad to year.
The past year
past you sorry. Sorry
you saw orange reflect
back, saw shreds and bark.
You are the one who named
it; you are the one who felt it flat
on your solid palm.

A Mother in the Wild

There, the boys near, obscured by branches
she can see but cannot name. Thin vine tangle,
the crunch of coupled dry leaves,
a day only slightly cold. Sky self-righteous, lightest pink.
She's there watching them. We
watch her watching. Their perfect
faces peer at her periodically from the other side of
massive fallen trees.
They don't need her here, kindly tolerate her presence
on the periphery, then they move deep into the property,
where they know she's too big to follow. The girl swings,
a course in suspended delight. The two boys,
mere sounds, cracking and whoops, dictate
the motion of trees. The Mother follows
the girl's movement forward, back, next to these,
beside, her body made into a bended crown. See?
The part in his hair. See?
The broad winged hawk.

See? A daughter's shining eyes. See? The scar
where she split her lip. See? It was sewn back up.
Their beauty seems to her supernova, seed.
They've become extraterrestrial, a series of startled facts,
revelations of themselves. They are surely the products
of her own imagination, spheres she's pulled
from her pocket and tossed out into the wild
of a dark,
trembling world.
She can't. She can't do this. They think,
they are. This is terrifying, basic, and strange. They
are out there rummaging, their blue coats hum with electricity,
the night is hewn
by beacons, the approaching night.

KRISTINA ERNY

Letter from the Mother

Dear _____,

The snore of our child hinges
the afternoon

I tried not to hear all night
Pushed to broke all that's left is crumpled, crust

I'm too easy to crack

Love,

the window's open I can see ginkgo hear it as yellow laughter

It should make me happy

That orange cat his soggy couch cushion throne outside
hilarious

Our child

throws his chicken to the floor chokes on the top of a strawberry

hears the birds

sings the

King

Song

See me recognize tiny towers of good?

Duplo roads

little metal cars

oven melted one taco

truck fire car

the bad guys

O

We are care-taken with care owned,
destroyed Nobody chooses but my body knows

no wins

Except sweeping food from floors

Except stickers adhered madly to the wall your cold feet
while reading

Lights stepped on finally to turn off the end of the day
our mutual exhaling

Doors slid closed behind a body learning to walk

Does it get any better?

Less lips bitten blood wise

too spicy

NO

Forehead stood

knocked

I love you

The fever's finally broken

His same

too warm body again skinned

skin again not flame

KRISTINA ERNY

The Mother

after Gwendolyn Brooks

I, small. You, wind. Ghost children, damp and luscious. Deliberate. You return, rather than were made. Breath tumults your singers, your games. You killed my breasts. You forget, baby. You will believe children, lives unfinished. You sigh, snack sucking-thumb, whine, scuttle off. You, as children, die lovely, sweet. Become old.

I knew, I, as air, loved. I sinned, and contracted, gobbling silence, my dim voice. I sucked. I seized you, loves; your born bodies, your birth, luck. Tried controlling you, tried dimming your beginning, who you are. Faulty abortion of will, pulp or workers, dead. Let's not remember that though.

I faintly loved. I loved you, all. You giggled though, heard wind, reached, stole names, poisoned straight your hair. My aches. I never neglected you, believe me, if truth said so, dears. I have sweet anyhow since by deliberateness planned what I shall say. You got voices; you had wills. You handled marriage, eased into your deaths. You did not get little: as your mother, I believed in my tears. I was, I am, afraid. Why whine even now?

Never that, never leave, never will, never stilted, never instead, never were, never them. I have said I cried, how eyes could be. What could beat other than that? Is that a crime? You're not me, but, you, too, have seen.

KRISTINA ERNY

Memory of the Mother

while wandering someone gave us this rock
I have my arms to carry it I wanted to take it
while wandering I'm wondering where's our home
there's drywall makes a box we're all in it it'll crack remember
that one time
you punched a hole in the wall
we lived were living at the Hilton serviced apartments with gaudy brass
lamps
you said it was bedtime
some art a recent painting you covered it
I love my House
or *Mom*
you didn't tell me about this maw until later I pulled it
off and saw and asked you
a confession of fisted anger sane and sweet kiss of drywall
it listed and gave way
remember beige Korean wallpaper glittering gently
I get angry too
they just break me and break me with their little chisels
they don't see me breaking
so right in their face with this rock it's damn heavy
I wanted to carry it remember you said you'd help me