

KAT CAMERON

Wandering in Wonderland

One day you wake up to find you've become the Red Queen,
a bad joke, screaming "Off with her head"
at a pretty Tenniel blonde shrinking down to size
with a Drink Me potion. It takes more than that
to shrink an aging queen, remove the wrinkles, style the hair,
look hot in a frock made of playing cards, your creator
a creepy Oxford don with a lexicon
 from the asylum
and a penchant for snapshots of green girls
in their birthday suits.

The famous photo. Not naked, but nearly so,
artfully arranged white rags, nasturtiums crushed
under your feet, the slightly exposed nipple.
The Beggar Maid
 by Tennyson. Oh, romantic Victorian,
shouldn't your mother have known the subtext?

Remember that golden July afternoon, your dark hair rippling
down your back and the lovely robin's egg dress
puffed out over white lace pantaloons?
How dressed up you felt. Your father's friend was odd,
 you knew it, but he told such fantastical
tales and even if he touched your hand
too often and sat too close in the boat,
 you told yourself it didn't matter,
he was old after all. You could coax him
to tell you anything.

Drink Me, Eat Me,
the potions cannot change you now. You want to go back,
tell that young girl to stay away from Oxford dons,
but then there would be no Beggar Maid,
no Alice in Wonderland, no Red Queen.

 Just Mrs. Reginald Hargreaves
and her three sons (two dead in the Great War)
and her cricketer husband.

Kat Cameron's second poetry collection, Ghosts Still Linger (University of Alberta Press, 2020), won the High Plains Book Award for poetry in 2021 and was a finalist for the Stephan G. Stephansson Award for Poetry. Her collection of short stories The Eater of Dreams (ThistleDown Press, 2019) was shortlisted for the Danuta Gleed Literary Award. Her poetry and fiction have appeared in numerous journals and anthologies, including Geist, Grain, New Forum, Prairie Fire, and Room. She lives on Treaty 6 territory and teaches creative writing at Concordia University of Edmonton.