

RENEE RODIN

Mid-Stream

after 2,000 days and nights spent bleeding
I look forward to the change
and back to the beginning

the surreptitious whispering behind doors
between my sister and my mother
the intrigue of the kotex pamphlet
with its indecipherable diagrams
left tantalizingly around

two years later
at the sight of my bloody bloomers
(to combat sub-zero Montreal winters
we wore heavy cotton underwear
that ended half-way down our thighs)
sent me screeching into the kitchen
SOMETHING WEIRD IS HAPPENING TO ME

my mother was at the table
rolling out dough for strudel
she lifted a floury paw
that landed as a slight slap*
on my face
a hit of luck from a place
far different than those smacks
she usually dished out

I became a dust puff of pride
as she who rarely expressed approval
lavished me with affection and
the words "today, you are a lady"

though a "lady" she knew I'd never be
this person who often had quite a mouth on her
resorted to coyness when it came
to acknowledging this bodily function

I acted as if it were my personal achievement
getting my "period"
boasted about it to all my friends
yet many was the day
I'd crawl home from school into bed
wishing I were dead to escape the misery
how could anything so fabulous create such
pain?

time, ginger and raspberry leaf tea
made it better but even at its worst
whether from that initial reception
or my relief I was just reacting
to the vagaries of hormones
there wasn't a month I wasn't thrilled
by that first red stain

when Joey began to menstruate
I too tapped her face before we embraced
it was on a visit east
for a golden anniversary
at a table whose surface was rendered invisible
by the copious amount of food
(cold cuts, knishes, bagels, pickles)
the word went whispered
around

amidst the blush of embarrassment
was the flush of pleasure darkening
my daughter's delicate cheeks
to her we raised our glasses
"mazel tov" (good luck) "l'chayim" (to life)
"today you are a woman"

* No one has known the origins of this ancient ritual, passed down to generations of Jewish females. There is speculation that the slap had to do with the giving of "colour" to replace the paleness expected to result from the loss of blood.

Renee Rodin is a Vancouver-based writer and visual artist. "Mid-Stream" is excerpted, with permission, from Bread and Salt, her book of prose-poems and images, published in fall 1996 by Talonbooks.

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