



Two Poems

Peter Cooley

For My Sister on Guy Fawkes Day

When Plath set out to kill herself she died,
the third time anyway. But that's not you.
You go on living, even though you tried.

First, a college freshman, you made Dad lie
to get you back in: "a bad case of the flu."
When Plath set out to kill herself she died.

Next, job after job, fired, you screamed *fried*.
Yes, you were always late, but they had it in for you.
You go on living, even though you tried.

Your third: some handsome boyfriend bought a different bride
and after you gave him all your trust fund, too.
When Plath set out to kill herself she died.

I married, had three kids, our mother cried:
at every birth you slit your wrists anew.
You go on living, even though you tried.

Now you're locked up: you'll never get outside
to kill me as you'd hoped. Or yourself. You're through.
When Plath set out to kill herself she died.
You go on living and go on living, even though you tried.

My Sister Closes the Closet Door

Self-imprisoned in your dark apartment at the home,
that sparrow on the window ledge your only friend
if you would deign to raise your head,

your days of costume mistress to yourself
would be another life ago without my memory.
I bring you back: once you were fat, then thin

through starvation dieting, emerging, nineteen
at ninety pounds. You were re-born: a shopaholic,
a goddess who could re-invent the world

by decking out your body with fineries
from Saks or Bonwit's: pongees and nubby twills,
jewelry to rival Cleopatra, pastel pumps and slings

in such profusion littering the closet floor
they might have been the drop pile at Goodwill.
You bought, you returned, you kept. Pregnant, your closet

swelled with dresses never worn or slipped on once
then given to charity if you were bored, enraged.
Had I been a girl, I might have been jealous

of such abundant pillaging of Dad's reserves.
Ten years younger than you, I was terrified, curious.
Later, after therapy, I saw you as a burlesque

sister, a succubus, in your abortive efforts
to strangle me sleeping till I was ten,
then to mock my wife and children. Now, locked away,

doing bad time for haute couture and child abuse,
you self-lobotomize. Like your brief, botched career
as teacher of the retarded, your love affairs derailed

by hatred of the male, your addictions have "retired"
to this nursing home, the black woman you despise



your sole companion in the two sequestered rooms

neither sun (that pun I hate) nor star,
not even a dark one, can break through
(a note pinned to the drapes, "Never, open, never!!!")
to your shadowless, unreflecting self-strangulation.