

GLORI SIMMONS

Candor

from the notes of Madame Restell, 1878

TRADE

Advertising is key: *I have something you need.*

I thin the edges so to speak,

meet demand with supply, fill orders, trade that

for this: *female derangement's panacea* at Greenwich 148.

In this case, less is more.

RED

Mercy alone is no motive. I work for red velvet

& a washbasin that is more than pannier.

Gravid, a girl with a familiar accent asks: *What can be done?*

There are no words for red that do not connote blood.

A narcissistic color, it sees itself in everything.

REAL ESTATE (I)

The old parlor game—Marooned on Manhattan Island,
what would I bring? My ledger, my curatives & schemes.

A Plan B. Women ordering from the menu directly.

Certainly, no more physicians, father-types, or masked men.

Over time I've noticed: it's most often the prostitute who pays.

A WORD TO THE OPPOSITION

Minister, what's so delicate about the swinging door,
its ragtag, tenemental ins and outs?

So much birth attracts flies—like flame to kerosene.

All born, there would never have been enough Beethovens
to drown out the ruckus.

WHALE BONE

Whale fat, melted down, burns our lamps & the women
given their bones. We knit them into our hair,

weave them through our ribs like Peterborough baskets.

In torture, the body contains both crime & punishment.

Needlework's answer to knitting booties: a stab in the dark.

REAL ESTATE (II)

Marooned on Manhattan Island, what would I bring?
Born thirsty, I'd bring water. I like the current flowing
Uptown & can hold my head high
above the Pecksniffian stink. If required, Minister,
I will unlock my ledger, name names.

FOR CAROLINE

Of all my critics, I hoped you would finally understand.
I told only sugar pill lies, what they wanted to hear—
Mother Love's invention. You are mistaken
to say I do not love children: think of all the daughters I have saved
from their mothers. If I didn't do it for you, then for whom?

FROM THE TOMBS

I spun misfortune into gold, was called Angel
of the Second Chance. My reward: a moustache
inked beneath my nose, bat wings pinned upon my back.
Now this trickery: a limestone cell & early retirement.
What worried you more? What I took or what I gave?

REAL ESTATE (III)

Who could have foreseen the destitute row
where I first weeded out the kin would grow so
monumental—& then fall?
From my midwifery, I leave Carrie a house she can sell
for a litter's future & for myself a bath the length of my limbs.

BATH

Consider this my letter of resignation.
A girl in a sanguine mood once told me:
There was no one but myself to hold my head under the water.
Who has not taken life into her own hands, pinched her cheeks
to create a blush? Other words for float—

unfasten,

drift.