

MARGARET HONTON

Abortion Poem

"Now I'll read my abortion poem," she said
in the Browsing Room—petite, with auburn hair;
at Hillel—tall and thin, with bony wrists;
on the Terrace—wholeheartedly Black, radiant;
in the Little Theater—self portrayed as "fair with freckles,"
young, sexually active, in her "golden seedtime."

"Now I'll read my abortion poem," she said
riffing through pages that chronicle her life and vision,
"every woman has one . . ." paging, finding hers.
"Any woman who calls herself a feminist
and has not had an abortion is a fake."
High frequency reception. Immediate audience response
to freely versed might-have-beens,
to odes and menses and the tides,
to lyrics on the gathering-in and the letting-go:
words flowing red, unstaunched.

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Now I'll read my abortion poem: three strophes.
Staging of the first is vacation time, Upper Michigan,
the friendly Rexall Drugstore where I stand
at a very public telephone in a corner,
youngsters ogling girlie magazines, and select
from yellow pages an obstetrician and a priest
while friend husband hesitates . . .
chocolate? or strawberry? milkshakes to go.
(Neither of us knows the hazard to a D & C.)
I'm wearing a sundress in harlequin red/orange/green.
I kid myself the splotches of blood hardly show,
but can't deny the white sandals have been ruined.

"Spontaneous abortion" is the term — my second, in Indiana
where I had sat on the front stoop of a rundown duplex
protesting to the night in an agony without a garden,
Not me. Not again. Not so soon.
Salty tears, a bitter cup; I swallowed them both.
But the humanly imperfect fetus rejected them both,
presenting me in breech: hard labor, sweat,
and blood the shape and texture of beef liver slices.

My abortion poem doesn't read well.
The audience is fidgeting, so I'll skip the part
about the Families Weekend at a church retreat in Ohio,
about the footbridge, the swimming pool, my crying jag,
the mess on the mattress of the cabin bunk—
unladylike, unfeminine, appallingly female.