

## PEEP SHOW

### 1. Doll's Doll

He woke me up. I was sleeping  
and he woke me up for the scene:  
a man licked whipped cream  
off a woman's swelled breast,  
a cherry dotting the nipple.  
I knew my father just wanted  
to show someone, my mother's back  
turned away in their motel bed.  
Even *she* was naked  
at least once, though I still thought  
I was my mother's miniature,  
features abstracted like those Russian dolls  
that fit inside each other, the smallest  
with only a smudge for a mouth.  
Home now, I catch my mother  
flipping channels in the cable-dark.  
Her eyes graze each body, flickering  
from bed to bed, the woman's lashes  
black as spiders' legs in close-up, lips  
moving a half-second after her words.

### 2. Dirty Poem

A friend of mine takes off her clothes  
at night for money so she has the day  
free to write stories—the kind  
I bought through mail order  
in middle school, then highlighted  
to pass to friends in class.  
It's just a job, she says: four nights a week  
she squats in her glass box,  
men jacking off in front of her, pumping  
quarters to keep the window open.

But here, at least, she's the main character—  
she paints her toenails, she sucks a dildo  
that glows in the dark, and all the while  
mentally counting her tips  
and mouthing what they ask to hear.  
At least she's not the one who wipes  
the booths down at closing.

If I worked at the Lusty Lady  
I could make \$100 for half an hour  
but I'd have to change my name to something  
provocative, though I know a stripper  
named Candida and none of her clients  
get the joke. They want a centerfold  
with legs spread wide enough  
for them to see inside. In my friend's fiction,  
it's two women, one with eyes masked  
by a bandana; the other, lips parted,  
saying something like *love*.

### 3. Confessional

I've never been tied up. I've thought about it, though. *What did you imagine?* I had this braided belt back in college that was always too big for me. I imagined slipping it from the loops, wrapping the ends around my wrists, then pinning him with my fists. *Who was he?* A lover I had briefly, back in college. He liked to talk while we fucked—it wasn't *making love*—sometimes about the size of his cock, which wasn't too impressive so I always had to stifle a laugh. Other times he'd ask me what I wanted, but I was too embarrassed to tell him. *Why were you embarrassed?* I don't know. Maybe I was afraid my fantasies were too pedestrian for him. He was a poet, so I was careful with clichés. Isn't that silly? I knew he'd be into it. The idea was more arousing to me than actually doing it, I guess. *That's easier for you, isn't it—dealing with your desires by making them cerebral?* I don't think so. I mean, I'm hardly a prude. But I never had the courage to try it. If *courage* is the right word. *What about your friend, the one who dances at the club? Did you think she was brave?* I admired her, sure. To get up there every night and become someone else; what woman doesn't want to do that from time to time? Once I tried on one of her

costumes—this leather bustier with garters and five-inch spiked heels. I looked ridiculous. But what impressed me most was her attitude. She said that she felt empowered, even then, with men watching. *And you believed her?* Only partially. I can see her point, that she's not exploited if she's a willing participant. But I can't help wondering how much of that is just rationalization. Can desire ever be truly equal?

*What about the movie you watched with your father? Did it appeal to you back then?* Of course not. I remember laughing mostly because it was so silly—the whipped cream, the guy with his enormous dick—it was probably John Holmes, but of course I didn't know it at the time. *How old were you?* Eight? A few years older? *Did you know much about sex?* I knew the basics, maybe a little more. I'd seen my father's *Hustler* magazines. He kept them in a drawer by the bed, but they never were really hidden from me. Sometimes I was with my mother when she bought them. *Your mother bought them for him?* Sure. I never thought anything of it. *And now?* I don't know. It makes me sad that he needed them, even worse that she knew about it. It would be different if they read them together. Who knows—maybe they did. *And what about that night at the motel?* You have to remember that I was in a cot on the other side of the room. I probably begged him to let me watch. And it wasn't like he was getting off on it—he was laughing, just like me. It was like our own private joke. If anything, I loved him more for being frank with me. *But surely you recognize it now as a moment of questionable parenting.* Of course. I can't be sure how or even if it happened the way I remember. Just that I'm not ashamed to talk about it. That counts for something, doesn't it? *Where was your mother throughout all of this?* Hiding her face in her hands. *Seriously.* She was embarrassed by anything. If my father belched she'd act like she'd never heard anything like it. Like she'd never done it herself. Secretly, though, I think she thought it was pretty funny; she just wouldn't say so, like it was inappropriate. Of course her embarrassment only made me want to be just like him. *Who do you think you take after the most, your mother or father?* My father, I guess. But I'm not sure. Maybe my parents were more alike than I realized. It was my mother who told me about sex, after all; my father died right before I met my first boyfriend. How's that for a Freudian coincidence? And now my mother watches those late-night, straight-to-cable flicks by herself. What's that John Lennon tune? "Whatever Gets You Thru the Night." 'Salright. 'Salright.

#### 4. The Good Parts

This morning I caught my neighbor naked  
through open drapes, her apple-shaped ass  
facing the window, leg slung over a man's hip.  
Sure I lingered, and who wouldn't,  
desire laid out before me like a diagram  
in the medical text my parents kept  
on the highest shelf, behind glass.  
Even Barbie's nippleless breasts  
seemed wrong to me back then,  
so I pierced those plastic-molded scoops  
with straight pins, made my androgynous  
dolls into boys, a red ribbon dangling  
improbably between their legs.

People are just paper dolls waiting  
to be stripped down to their flimsy essence,  
posed in constant want. But who says  
they're not looking back at us?  
What if the image in the glass  
were a mirror, a microscope,  
drawing each detail of our own lives  
into focus? Past your gaze,  
past the butt and tit and skin  
a woman's breathing in that box.  
She knows what you want, bound up  
on the other side like a mummy  
in a comic book, groping toward  
the next frame. She is watching you.