

Laurel Gene

Shave the sheets of my songless success,
expose the rotted age of me now—
my toothless breasts, my hips like a cracked cow skull
hanging crooked on the butcher's wall.

Remember what I once was.
The laurels of the Gene name.
My boom impact on the Baby Generation.
My prepubescent niche pizzazz.

Remember how the phone threw offers
for Little Jenny Sues into my father's ear.
He'd suck the bucks out of the cord,
a straw into a spectrogram.

I was his dark sparkler. A tarantula on fire.
An innocent with apple-juice eyes
and a brain full of famished birds.

I used to play characters. Now I'm portrayed.
As 30 year old 80 year old domestic darling.
My husband's office phone plays mum. The only offers
are from the sink's silverfish to kill them.

When I vacuum I think of Ingmar Bergman
fucking me from behind. I open
like the palms of Julius Caesar to a crowd.
Men used to rearrange their months to fit my seasons.

I suck a finger then the cauldron in his tip.
He films my apron sticking to the sweat.
Makes this bad heart a pulse from the sky.
I am a distant explosion of myself again. A star.

Remember being a star.
This is how to die in the arms of a suburban wind,
learning how to be forgotten
over and over again.



Author's Note

In 2009, I was very taken by the death of thirty-two-year-old actress Brittany Murphy, someone I had never met and knew very little about personally but whose industry (Hollywood) I knew intimately, being a former child actress myself. After writing a poem about her, I began to study and explore the lives of other child star actresses who grew up in the public light and died tragically in their twenties and thirties while searching both intra- and interpersonally for identity, mass acceptance, and success. I then asked artists to create original works of art based on the actresses—to interpret my interpretation.

Judith Barsi was a ten-year-old child actress who appeared in television and film. After many years of physical and emotional abuse, Judith and her mother left Judith's father. Soon after, he murdered both of them and burned their house down before turning the gun on himself. The line drawing of a singed teddy bear was drawn by German artist Sandro Kopp.

Peg Entwistle was a 1920s theater actress who struggled to make a transition into film during the Depression. One evening after attending dinner at her uncle's house, she walked up into the hills of Los Angeles and jumped off the H in the HOLLYWOOD sign to her death. The collage art was created by my father, actor and artist Russ Tamblin.

Laurel Gene is a figment, and an exorcism, of my imagination. The charcoal sketch is by artist, musician, and director David Lynch.