

JACQUELINE BERGER

*At the Holiday Crafts Fair*

My friend and I sell compasses  
next to a girl selling goddess magnets.  
She's so female the air around her  
is perfumed—crushed lavender,  
curry soup. She's in her twenties  
and has a baby who all day travels  
from hip to lap. Both of them  
blond and every part of their bodies  
pumped full, the abundance  
of nature bursting into life.  
I remember learning to shade in art class,  
circles darkened from below  
until they were globes.  
A useful skill considering the lips  
and cheeks, the belly and ass.  
Watching the girl as she walks across the room,  
her hips in a stretch skirt,  
her milk-rich breasts straining the cotton tee,  
almost makes me a believer.  
And when she pops a breast  
out of her shirt to nurse, I can feel  
it in my mouth, both the nipple  
and the firm swell of flesh around it.  
Midday, her friend comes to join her,  
they talk of remedies, essential essences,  
they praise the Goddess,  
passing the child between them.  
Then the dad arrives.  
He's Venezuelan, tall and so thin his hips  
jut out where his stomach dips in.  
He's loose as a hinged board, slow as oil.  
Now I want to marry both of them,  
let the swollen river of their nights  
gush over me.

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Okay, the woman's views are daft  
and the man's English needs work,  
and they just moved out of their one-bedroom  
to a converted garage. But youth,  
that country I never felt at home in,  
is bright as sun on water  
and shines on them.  
Their skin is a place to settle,  
a philosophy, a way of life.  
He comes back from the food booth carrying pie  
with whipped cream. They eat it  
together, the spoon dipping  
into one mouth then the other.  
The baby is happy, gurgling  
at the nipple, the woman  
is blessed she tells us during a lull  
between customers, and I believe it,  
blessed in a way I've never been,  
cradled in her body, using it  
for every purpose it was intended for.  
Thanksgiving's just around the corner,  
the feast day's table around which  
my own family will gather.  
My father being helped to his place  
by the caregiver, who settles him in,  
ties a napkin around his neck.  
He's messy as a toddler now,  
suddenly left-handed, his whole  
right side refusing to work.  
Next to him, my mom, hunched  
but tough, my brother who is loud,  
the husband I married in my forties.  
We will drink wine left over from the wedding,  
lift our glasses to each other, here at the table  
at the start of one more winter, then  
lower our heads to the meal.