

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.

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.