

POETRY | FALL 2020

Crying Uncle

By Varsha Kukafka

Uncle lost his arms in several wars. His watch
is stopped at quarter-past-till-then. Uncle is our glory friend.
He coaches, warms us, warns us, day-to-day,
on Phillies scores and goals and cheers and five-card
stud and family first and love-at-sight. His dragons end
in happy ever after. His monsters join us for a beer.

Uncle, you have given us a fright.
You died last night.

Momma feeds us onion cake. We cry. We clutch
our bellyache. We hold our breath, exude
Jurassic sigh, the stars emit a terrifying light.

Daddy rips up tongue-and-groove to start a fire.
Shadows groan and trudge in small parades. We huff
and puff and blow singed kisses round the room. One
tiny angel glitters, glowers, vanishes inside a rose.
We douse our naked heartache in the blaze.

Brother sips his lilac lemonade and leaps on pointed toes.
We cluster bright as diamonds, reach for him and miss.

Sister never moves. She hovers over plates of venison
and beef, grits hen-like teeth, spits salty whimpers
at our feet. We say a foolish prayer or two or three.

This happened once-upon-a-time, of course. No kindred
hodge-podge anymore. All gone. Faces fade as if
they never were. Voices muted for all time.
O what I wouldn't give for one more hand
of hearts, one do-si-do.

What to do? Sniff shirts they left behind? Weep?
Climb down the family tree? Ship my lost ones
out to sea the better to wash home to me?

Uncle Dear, at your demise (the first), my heart slid left.

You know it's never turned back right.

Varsha Kukafka is a writer whose work appeared in *AGNI Online*, *Salamander*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Philadelphia Stories*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Ibbetson Street* and other journals and in limited edition letterpress broadsides with her visual art. She has read at the Boston Poetry Festival and other venues. She served as an assistant district attorney for twenty years and was a licensed practical nurse. Her poems “Crying Uncle” and “We Almost Lost You” appear in the Fall 2020 *Intima*.

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