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## Fairy Tale

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*Cathleen Calbert*

Fairy Tale

Everyone knows  
who the witch is.

We've seen her  
dropping her kids off at daycare.

She's the anesthesiologist  
who hires a British au pair.

She's the teacher  
who gave you a D.

She's the woman  
who isn't smiling.

A lovely young thing  
into cigarettes and barbiturates  
failed at suburban housewifery.  
Her children ran off  
with their grandmother.  
Her husband swam in his own pool of gin.  
Their cottage creaked open  
like a Cape Cod beach shack.  
It moaned, "Love me, love me,"  
on summer mornings.  
In the winter, it stayed in a trance.

The witch is mad.  
 She's fruit-loops.  
 She's ding-dong nuts.  
 Besides, she's not the brightest bulb  
 in our poetic chandelier.  
 She can't remember anything.  
 She's been alone too long  
 in her red nightie.

In the old days,  
 she bedded the milkman,  
 the mailman, the guy from UPS.  
 Witches drive men crazy.  
 Then witches drive men crazy.  
 "Love me, love me,"  
 on summer mornings.  
 In the winter, a trance.  
 She's grown lonely as a flasher,  
 as a sheep rancher,  
 as an underpaid parlor maid.  
 She has been dreaming  
 of the flashy disappearances  
 of sister-witches,  
 how they clawed their way  
 to that moon.  
 She types out her own death warrant:

A boy and a girl,  
brother and sister,  
two pumpkin seeds,  
jog into the forest  
with seven finger-puppets,  
a bottle of their father's homebrew,  
and a number of questions.  
Little Ingrid and Petrovich  
punch each other's stomachs  
with the puppets sewn  
by their put-upon stepmother.  
They throw their golden bottle  
through the witch's window  
though no glass shatters.  
There is no glass.  
The damn bottle lands in her lap.  
Petrovich pokes his head in.  
Mr. Inquisitor.

The witch is lean  
as an ex-model,  
her smoky growl theatrical.  
She takes him into her starving arms  
and calls him Little Richard,  
sweet gherkin,  
my final folly.  
She diddles his pizzle  
and asks him to rock away

on top of her,  
a boat lost at sea.  
He does what he's told.  
He's a good boy.  
He plants his seed.  
Yet her uterus is blessed with emptiness.  
There's no way around this.  
She's in her forties.  
She writes fourteen poems for him  
when he leaves her  
to sleep off the beer buzz.

The witch tongues another Valium,  
ocean eyes on the moon.  
"I'm a circus freak," she says.  
"God's little Jesus."  
"Love me, love me,"  
Ingrid pipes up,  
taking her turn.  
"Love me, love me,"  
the witch moans into her cold soup.  
Ingrid nestles into her neck  
until the witch cuddles the girl,  
feeling the matching fingertips,  
mother-of-pearl rosary,  
and ruby nipples,  
then finds the peach-divide  
of her daughter's body,

and eats the child out  
of the woman,  
her rival,  
her devotee,  
her replacement.

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