

Visiting Day

I.

One winter I hung
my identity in the closet
to visit my parents

one more rekindling
to salvage family ties
dripping through cheesecloth.

before them I hunched
inside walls I hallucinated
as penitentiary concrete.

“How are we going to have a
relationship with your hair like that?”
my mother asked.

I felt brillo pad eyes
staring at my skull
as if it was in alien form.

My first inclination
was to exit cordially
and never return.

But my assignment
was to have closure
before death parted us.

They removed the velvet rope
I entered their exclusive club.
I pulled myself taught.

II.

I wonder
how many carcasses
proliferate family trees?

How many are shackled
in orange jump suits

at annual reunions?

How many innocents
are gutted and served
at the family feast?

I resolved one day
to remove myself
from their menu.

III.

Autumn four years later,
the last season
I would self mutilate.

I reflect
on my bittersweet liberation
while suturing my wounds.

No longer ancestral drawings
in the caves of my memory
to ground myself.

It is excruciating to sever
parental connections
even for self preservation.

I know
they loved me hard
and with all their breath.

IV.

They who
sacrificed mountains
so I may prosper.

They who
constructed ramps so I
may leap over their backs.

They who
anguished nights over paper

to balance the bottom line.

I will never know
the aches from wearing battle armor
nor the pain from skirmishes

the miles they trudged
the health they jeopardized
the future they augmented

the sorrow that engulfs them now
to be estranged from the one they
once called their pride and joy.

V.

Yet this poem
is not about the sacrifice
of parents for children.

This poem is about
two people who failed to heed
Gibran's poem *On Children*

about bowing in submission
and making oneself small
to eat crumbs of acceptance

while witnessing digging heels
and righteousness indignation
and charmed condescension.

How many children have
jabbed needles like artwork
licked bottles squeaky clean

sucked pipes to the bottom
cast their bodies to fiends
and given up their flesh

because the two people
that encompassed their world
could not stand their sight?

Commodity

I.

Adjacent to
Lexington Market
God pimps in uniforms
spit scripture
like black widows
at recovering addicts

the zombies
dangling in their web
morph into
their minions
Poised to capture
more prey

II.

ATM machines hum
inside steeples
as oily palms
receive bills
to bestow upon their
master's coffers

Apparently
God
who created the
universe
needs cash
money

III.

People toss
the name of God
like pennies dropping
on sidewalk cracks

spiritual cataracts
blocking them from
seeing where God
fell

IV.

God
in white restraints
peers at orderlies
through pane glass

God
scratches hieroglyphics
with a shank
at the federal
penitentiary

God
illustrates on cardboard
under the highway
underpass

God
wipes blood between
legs after daddy
leaves

God
fails the high school
standardized test

God
gives blowjobs
in squad cars
after giving up
drug money and
product

God
has food stamps
cut off

God
contracts breast cancer
from carcinogens

and loses court case

God dies
and is buried

in Potter's field

IV.

God is
for sale