

Sample – *Open Your Mouth Like a Bell* Poetry Manuscript – by Mindy Nettifee

ELECTION EVE

I.

Any longer I can only speak in prayer.
My mouth opens and my father the preacher finds fresh life.
Only I pray to everything – the cracked lamp,
The turned back clocks, the four stamps with Harvey Milk's grin
Grinning like squares of witchcraft, the black globe on the bookshelf,
The fat pinecones, the still mute record player, the dew printed windows
who always answer my prayers with the same advice –
don't see, see-through.
I'm trying.
Most days it's like walking on the bottom of a swimming pool.
Like you're shouting from the surface and I hear you,
but it's like [underwater sounds].
I'm practicing with the deep. I've got to want it. I've got to push
Down here, negotiating the changes in gravity
to keep my instincts for the ground sharp.

II.

America, our chickens are coming home to roost,
But they're all fucked up.
They've been feeding on science fiction.
They've been eating zombies and robot rebellions
And the curdling screams of Sigourney Weaver
And now they are hungry for apocalypse.
They come up the driveway moblike,
like a sea of hair pieces out for blood.

III.

The Dalai Lama has weighed in from the land of forever mudras.
He's been eating the pink sugar skulls of lovingkindness.
He's replaced his asshole with warm light.
He speaks to the New York Times from beneath the giant ruby resting on his chest.
And offers a simple transmission:
behind the anxiety and uneasiness is a fear of being unneeded.
We hunger for our right place.
We hunger to be in service.
This is the most human hunger.
We want to light the fire for another's way, so that we might see our own.
The answer to all this pain and rage is not, finally, systemic.
It's personal – we must begin to appreciate the gifts of all others.
I picture myself trying to find the gift in Donald Trump,
But it keeps morphing into a vision where I go to rip out his heart on national television
but find only a gold watch. The audience gasps.
Meanwhile drought.

Meanwhile despair gathers like dead needles on the forest floor.

IV

Three days left and Nate Silver is crystal balling it.

The gods are lining up for our genuflecting:

Great Florida, wearing matching magenta capes with its wild haired children

Miami, Orlando, Pensacola, West Palm Beach, Jacksonville.

Holy Pennsylvania, munching mountain laurel on a pile of deer.

All powerful North Carolina, Michigan, Colorado, Virginia, Wisconsin.

Sublimest Iowa, Ohio, Minnesota, Nevada.

Please, be merciful.

May the lie detector tests of our collective guts

still know how to sound alarms in the time of free porn

and the time of reality TV and the time that trust left us.

Please. Please. Please. Please.

Please.

V.

Sister Hillary.

Grandmother with the good hair.

Grandmother who doesn't even know how to use a computer.

Grandmother Methodist.

Grandmother carved in the classrooms and courtrooms of petty men drinking power in their dark blue suits.

Grandmother warrior pose.

Grandmother complexity.

I imagine your neural pathways, dense glittering city maps of knowledge and lessons and experiences and all the hands you've shook and all the bodies you've hugged and all the concern you've felt, pathways flooding electric with relationship.

Grandmother come from the temples of bureaucracy with the wands of policy and teamwork and repair and warm chiding.

Grandmother scaring the shit out of us.

Grandmother come to slay the myth of isolation.

I save my final morning prayers for you.

I try to sound perfect and righteous and start crying.

All the objects in the room lean in.

VI.

Sincerity is the only currency I bring.

On this eve of Eves, on this swell of tidings,

On this forking river of time, dice in the air, copper panic in the air,

All I have to do is stand here in my vulnerability and desire.

All I have to do is stand here with my whole heart.

I must not hold my breath, but rather, breathe.

Feet planted firmly on the ground.

Head gathering sun.

I am made of seeds.