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# Private Hunger

Akron Series in Poetry

Akron Series in Poetry

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Melody Lacina, *Private Hunger*

George Bilgere, *The Good Kiss*

# Private Hunger

Poems by  
Melody Lacina



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To my mother and father

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# I



## WHAT I BELIEVE IN

I believe in dark chocolate and salt on the lip  
of a margarita glass. I believe in daylight  
savings time, dressing babies in bright colors,  
and cremation. Writing comes before cleaning.  
White paint needs a little cream. Never  
stick a fork in a plugged-in toaster.  
I don't believe anyone nailed anywhere  
will rise. I believe in the underside.  
I believe in everlasting soul but not in  
talking about it, in being quick  
to start and slow to finish. I believe in  
the rhythm and off-rhyme of the ordinary.  
I would never name a dog Prince. I would never get  
a sex-change operation. I would never put nuts  
or raisins in carrot cake. Don't live inland  
without a river. Don't forget your roots.  
What I believe in is simple  
architecture, thrust and arch, the bitter-  
sweet smell of sex. I don't believe love is  
a two-way street but a median strip  
with traffic. I believe in being kind.  
Remember what you can and make up the rest.

## BITTERSWEET

No one here knows what it is.  
Not the adjective, common enough,  
but the noun, brittle branches  
clotted with berries, berries  
like small hearts that pulse  
out of the fruit's orange skin.  
In autumn, bittersweet grows  
between the soy and corn fields  
my father used to plow. Forty years  
the farm's been gone now. Still  
he drives the old roads and eyes  
the harvest as if the yield,  
each acre, matters. Mostly he watches  
the birds, bright finches skittering  
toward the timber, hawks  
lifting from fence posts driven  
deep as a grave to last. And because  
he remembers how my mother loves  
the vine with its blood berries, how she  
sings above the sharp snags and makes  
them beautiful in a wood bowl,  
my father looks for the bittersweet  
to untangle from the barbed wire, break  
gently, and carry home.

# CORN

More common than roses,  
corn grew up with us in backyards and vacant lots  
like so many neighborhood kids. On Sunday afternoon drives,  
Dad could point out cornfields even when the tongues of shoots were  
barely aboveground. By the time stalks resembled spines  
and leaves waved to us in slow greeting,  
he was already gauging acreage yields like the farmer  
he used to be. In August, his best friend Bob  
loaded our Buick's trunk with bags of corn.  
We shucked it on the back porch steps  
while Mother set water to boil. Steam rose  
from the platter on the supper table.  
Night after night, we mouthed corn like harmonicas.  
We couldn't get enough of it.  
Out on Jensens' farm, we climbed up to the corncrib.  
Sun sifted through the weathered boards; the ladder's wood  
was rough. At the top of the ladder at the edge  
of the crib, we scooped up handfuls of dusty  
ocean. We had never seen the ocean.  
We had never seen so much corn. It trickled  
between our fingers, cooler and smoother than water.  
We touched it again. We jumped.  
The sudden cloud above the corn reminded us of breath  
in winter. It drifted toward the rafters  
where swallows rearranged their wings.  
In the corn we swam in languid circles. We wore its sediment  
like a second skin. Later someone told us  
how we could have died there:  
our bodies dragged down like reluctant stones,  
our throats filled with dry air, then corn.

## HOW I GOT MY NAME

My father's family brought the last name  
like luggage from Czechoslovakia,  
the hard consonants picked over  
and dropped at Immigration  
where officials slurred the vowels.

The middle one is simple, namesake  
of my mother's second sister  
who died while still a child.  
Pneumonia. My mother knew  
when her mother out of the ordinary  
stood waiting on the corner  
at the end of school.

*It should have been me,*  
Great-grandma Ray whispered,  
as if death had come to the right house  
but knocked on the wrong bedroom door.

Melody, my first name,  
owes nothing to anybody  
except my parents. No, they aren't  
musicians, though they like music  
well enough: my mother humming  
old hymns in the kitchen,  
my father sorting the trills  
of cardinal and finch.  
When I ask them why they chose my name,  
they say, *The way it sounds.*  
Before memory and roots, the unreasonable  
singing.