

## The Obligatory Future Child Poem

*Autistic women are sometimes collectively referred to as the 'Lost Girls'. This is due to our often being misdiagnosed with other conditions, or undiagnosed entirely, as a consequence of sexist ideas and stereotypes surrounding Autism.*

If I were to have one, I'd call her Adelaide  
after the Australian city because it's where,  
if I could, I'd fly south every year  
for my winter hit of kindling-wild summer – she'd lie  
in her pram, at the starts of birches and utility poles,  
enraptured at their branches' and cables' flickering  
before the sky, and later she'd hate hair brushing time,  
and just as my parents, devoid of the vernacular, always knew,  
I'd know there was *something wrong different* –  
we're known as the Lost Girls because they lose us  
between the party table and the water feature,  
between the taunt/pinch and the teacher's averted eye,  
between the unzipped fly and the bed,  
and to be a Lost Girl is to reach through smoke for a rung  
that isn't there, to lick a climbing frame's steel limb  
as other children play Grandma's footsteps,  
this loss so whole and irredeemable,  
us like iPhones dropped from research vessels  
above the Challenger Deep, that I could never bear  
to let love surge in over me: please let me tell you this,  
you ask me *don't you want your own family* and I see  
July, diesel-thick and cloying, and me at the table  
with the other mothers, drinking gin-infused Pimm's  
and diligently nodding, while my little Addie –  
she's five now – the outlier on the grass's scatter graph  
of children, murmurs her universe to herself,  
flickering her spring-white fingers at the wind,  
and one of the little boys pushes her and smears  
Iceland chocolate gateau on her new tiny lilac dress  
and his mother fails to stop her eyes laughing  
and another mother looks at me, clears her throat  
and says, *have you ever thought she might be*, and quite  
apart from this, at sleep's first slow swallow, I listen  
as her mewl fractures the walls, I in a locked room, lying  
in a bath of my own blood and screaming *Addie! Adelaide!* –  
I call on the things I've been unable to do  
to the people I love – as in high-speed trains,  
as in the Clifton Suspension Bridge at high tide –  
I call on Addie's face, thumb in mouth, the switchblades  
of her cheekbones, and fuck, I couldn't, I couldn't.

## Mistress of Arts

My nicest psychiatrist said it was a *developmental delay*.  
As most men would, he said I was stranded – snow-globed –  
in a long winter; he thought he could hear the ice thinning,

that maybe there'd be blossom soon enough. This guy I met  
at a conference last month swore that Autistic people  
think only in images. But I explain it like this, Clover:

desire was like heating, once – too indulgent a luxury.  
All I could do was hold myself against this light,  
the gaping trap of it, the blunt force trauma. You say

*that makes sense*, and would it be socially unacceptable of me  
to tell you I'd love to give you a love bite now, here?  
That you keep me feral, that you keep me awake

and desperate to press my breastbone to yours? As always,  
I swallow the urge, condemn it to forever in the dark  
with the urges to stim, to scream. I've been a mistress of arts,

of disguise, my whole life – I've spent it shadowing  
my eyes, and furling. I tell you I'm thawing, far too quickly,  
at your feet; my skin fluorescent, my hot retinae

going *hush-hush* as my mind's stuffy laboratory  
develops thousands of images of your hands:  
pale satin; in sharp focus, yet blurred around your glass.