

your rings I wear today, by Tuaca Kelly

despicable tantrums
changed borders and names

imposing smoke and fire
forced fickleness upon the firmament
where blue skies and futures once lived

a child of faith
you walked it
when sirens
launched heartbeats into overdrive
prodding bloodlines
into steel and concrete dubiety

you refused to spend your life in the dark

when bombs fell
your resolve did not

dignity
akin to Spartan decree
with your shield or on it
your signature and spine
had character

with my shield or on it
the ride or die
transmitted through
your hand on my cheek
I miss your hand on my cheek

and how you never said my name
but summoned my attention
with the initials on my birth certificate

“T.C.”

in the accent I adored
the same one you tried in vain to shed
and how you said ‘stupid’ when watching a dummkopf on television
or ‘augh’ in sympathy when Ellen Degeneres came out
and the media threw stones
and I wondered if I could come out to you too

with my shield or on it
the ride or die

transmitted through
your hand on my cheek
I miss your hand on my cheek

I miss how you introduced me
with a sense of pride that made me invincible and buoyant – in our suits, me clung to your
back from
shallow to deep to shallow to
toes reunited with my independence

I was in awe of your magic and modesty
among hundreds of strangers
as we raised shots of Concord grape
responding in unison, “And also with you”
to let the priest know we meant it

I would inherit your 1981 Mercury Cougar
and our ritual
when time stood still
car in neutral
foot off the break
hands release the wheel
to be towed through the
lulling power of suds

It’s remarkable how you customarily lathered unfathomable layers of butter
on dark rye
were continuously disappointed
with the same bland results
declaring how it’s better in Germany

I relish how you didn’t hide your
jewelry fetish
your loved wearing gold
your love of golden rings on your hands

I reminisce how you called me
your bundle of joy
and asked for my pledge to never forget it
while in the red, white and blue
the longing for your sisters
waving black, red and gold
was evident
In your more vulnerable moments
you asked if I’d remember you

(grandmom)

I recall the impish glister
in your bedazzling blue
When your tootsies stealth-mode set foot on my lap "Rub grandmommy's feet"
knowing my hands wouldn't leave
them until the pain was gone

with my shield or on it

I was never more impressed by you
then the moment you told me
grandpop died
this was my greatest lesson in dignity

I was 21
21-guns fired in his honor
before I was ready to hear them
with my shield or on it
National Cemetery

Seven-years later we'd return there together
I'd leave without you

a woman of faith
you walked it
when God
called you home
your hand was in my hand
your last breath had my witness
with my shield or on it
the ride or die
transmitted through the double-helix
whose journey will end with me
your journey did not end with you

my ride or die
grandmom

I promise to remember

your hand on my cheek
I miss your hand on my cheek
Your love of golden rings on your hands
Your rings I wear today

MAN CODE 101 AKA PATRIARCHY by Kevin Groen

We are the boys who rule this world.
Learned the trick to owning is to simply
claim what you're not entitled to.
'Hey pretty lady'
'Hello sexy, where are you going'
'You should smile more'

We walk this world without fear
because we have taught this world
to fear us.

We're never at a loss for words
because we dominate every language.

Age 3.
When it was still normal for girls and
boys to swim naked together without any
body being sexualised.

Age 5.
When holding hands on the bus was all
the action we were hoping for.

Age 6.
We were "innocently" pulling girls' hair,
believing this was synonymous for
saying 'I like you'.

Age 12.
When girl friends' innocence has been
replaced by posters of bikini models,
hyper sexualised TV commercials,
and sex on screens with half-naked
actors but fully naked actresses.

Age 15.
Bragging to our friends that we got to
third base, as if girls were a game to be
played, and them losing meant us winning.
'Did you catch her?'
'Did you hit that?'
'Were you going for a homerun?'
'Did she put up a fight?'

Age 16.
The female body a menu, and the world a buffet.

'I'd like me some Asian'
'She's hot'
'I'd like to smack that ass'
'I'd like to eat her out'
'Look at those legs'
'I'd like to taste her'
'Great body, perfect proportions'
'I'm getting hungry'

Age 17.

The word 'No' not part
of our vocabulary anymore.

Age 18.

Officially an adult now, officially responsible.
Which is to say girls have become women.
Which is to say women are fully responsible.
Which is to say rape culture does not exist.

Age 19.

The patriarchy, an invisible cloak worn by men
making us invulnerable to vulnerability.
The patriarchy, an invisible dagger planted
in the backs of women, and us men telling
them 'You're overreacting, I don't see anything'.

Age 20.

Not once did we feel the need to text our
friends to tell them we made it home safe.

Age 28.

A man becomes a father to a daughter,
oblivious to the dangers she'll have to
navigate in today's society.

Age 45.

Telling her 'Society has come a long way,
we're all equal now, don't forget to carry
pepperspray when you leave the house'.

Age inappropriate.

We are the men who rule this world.
Learned the trick to owning is to simply
claim what you're not entitled to.
'I'm not sexist, but...'
'Don't be such an angry feminist,
it doesn't suit you'

'But not all men!
'She was just playing hard to get'
'It's not rape if...'
'Us men are the real victims here
we can't even...'

We walk this world without fear
because we have taught this world
to fear us.

We're never at a loss for words
because we dominate every language.

We are men baptised in male privilege
vowing to bow down to the patriarchy,
convinced we are all atheists.

They say that the best trick the devil
ever played was to make the world
believe he doesn't exist.

In a world in which women are
considered to be sinners,
it is such a privilege to be the devil...