

ON POSING

by Rachel Simon

I am my parents' only child –
on the windowsill, the piano
the stairs leading up to the attic.
I am frozen in time,
a baby in diapers,
a child in costume,
a teenager in feigned cooperation.
There are dozens of memories,
both real and created.

My every move is documented –
First on my mother's camera,
then in the pages of an album in the closet.
I am an expert on posing.
I can smile and hug and laugh
and make any notion of
hunger or exhaustion or discomfort
disappear before the flash of a lens.

I can show only what I want,
nothing more, nothing less.
I know how not to blink,
to be calm and collected and
always ready to pose,
threetwoone smile!
Sometimes there is truth behind the smile,
Sometimes there is not.
The key is being able to tell,
To be able to deceive
An audience, the camera, myself.
I am a master of disguise.

I watch my mother study the images
And wonder what she sees, why she has
an insatiable need for proof,
why she needs to see who friends and family were before
disease and anger and betrayal.
She races back and forth through time,
lingering on the past and flipping through the present
and landing on the blank white pages of the future.
There is a burden in the emptiness,
a pressure to destroy it and fill it with something new.

I follow my mother's footsteps.
I go behind the camera,
a new kind of posing.
I am comfortable
directing my subjects, making them wait,
only clicking the lens once every person
is happy and smiling and perfect.
There is a thrill in capturing
what no one knew was there.
I am the one who remembers –
each costume, each party, each moment.
I take my pictures and sometimes,
I let them see.
I carry the proof of their fun, their excitement.
There's a thrill in the power.

I fill up albums of my own,
thousands of faces and smiles and finger-clicks.
I study the pictures,
looking for assurance,
looking for proof.
I am my mother's daughter.
Like her, I need the pictures.
Without them,
without evidence,
how else do I tell fantasy from truth?