

Dirty Little Dresses

Back when you were still mine
- before school but after cradle –
we'd Wednesday walk to the village hall
puffing dragons' breath
across dim-lit benches and trestle tables,
our voices echoing bathroom-style.

At my feet you spilled Day-Glo orange squash
- the kind I wouldn't have in the house –
while I sipped something tepid and
vaguely coffee-flavoured from a plastic mug, tried
making big the small talk with other mothers.

All these years later I am surprised at your recall
of the precious poppet pushed through the door,
always dressed in impossibly white frocks, pretty,
pristine, seldom up for finger painting, sandpitting.

She played quiet, solo games emerging clean,
unruffled, remarked by a loud, proud parent
while you came back to me messy and wild,
hand painted, squashed and sandpapered.

You said you always had a thing for her
Snow Whiteness until secondary school
when she went Goth and the dresses darkened
to black, salacious slashes revealing flashes
of snail-trail scars on pale flesh.

Neither of us heard what became
of her pushy mother.

by Louise G Cole

