

"The Clinic" is published in Loch Raven Review Volume 15 No. 2, November, 2019
<https://thelochravenreview.net/bill-ratner/>

The Clinic

My Aunt Ellie drives me to the clinic,
snowdrifts flecked with asphalt
like black pepper on eggs,
melting on the curb in the early morning sun.

The snow will re-freeze tonight
and leak more blackened weather
down the sewer tomorrow.

My Aunt Ellie has convinced my mother
I need to talk to someone other than her
and the rest of my aunties.
There is no one left but aunties.

The grandmas and grandpas have died,
most of the uncles have passed on
and the ones who haven't
have drifted away
like pine logs down the Mississippi River.

Even my mom is an auntie.
Maybe she is my auntie
and not my mom.
What's the difference?
They all look the same.

Bottoms big as Buicks
breasts tented by sailcloth
and little flowers
like Spring Fling
at the Botanical Society.

I've had carnal with most of them
in my head anyway
a different auntie every morning
before I get dressed for work.

Sunday they all baked me something.
It is a plan they have
to make me zippy again
like when I was a tiny child

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like in the old days they say.

My Aunt Collie made a half-dozen Swedish croissants
a cream-colored excuse for dog snacks.
My Aunt Ellie baked me a half-dozen
oatmeal cookies hard as hockey pucks.

They take me to the gardens
and I nab those cookies and
skip them across Minnekawaga Pond
splish, splash, splash
like round rocks on Lake Superior
they angle their way down
to their deaths on the bottom.

Now Billy, how are they going
to clean those cookies
out of the pond?
asks my Aunt Ellie

Well, they could just turn
up the heat and boil them off
like mosquitoes, I say.

They don't have heat in the pond.
You remember the pond.
You used to put your little boats in it.

My Aunt Ellie's voice
is like a milk truck
spilled over in a gulley
with its engine idling.

My mom, or Aunt Mommy as I call her
made me a date pudding that stands up
like a penis on a puppy.
It just sits there on its plate
angry, shimmering, ready to attack.
I was afraid it was going to melt
like a tiny child
and die in the grass.

On the clinic wall a light goes on.
In a dark office Dr. Nelson
a cramped man
stubs out his cigarette

(continued)

in a moose antler ashtray
and slides a stack of ink
blot drawings across his desk.
These are from Switzerland
like the chocolate, he says.
I'm going to show them to you one at a time.
You will tell me what you see.

He edges his chair toward me.
I stare down at the pages.
And words come out of me
like in a fast game of charades.

This picture is a dead bug
but he is comfortable now
his stripes are not clothing
they are nature's designs, I say.

Is he scary?
asks Dr. Nelson.
No. He's dead.

Rushing through the pictures
I say things like *stag, squashed, pointy*.
I figure the words are related to my thoughts
but I'm not embarrassed.
I am happy someone is interested.

Are you all right for time? he asks.
I am confused by the question.

Time is a bitter expanse, it yawns at me,
cocoon me, propels me like a touch hole
at the end of a burning wick.

When does your school start? he asks.
I glance at my watch.
Well, I have to be standing in the hall
outside my office bright
and early at eight o'clock, I say.
I should go.

Yes, you should, he says.
A School Principal
can't be late to school
on a Monday morning.