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HOLLIE MCNISH

EMBARRASSED

i thought it was ok - i could understand the reasons
they said there might be young children or a nervous man seeing
this small piece of flesh that they weren’t quite expecting
so i whispered and tiptoed with nervous discretion
but after six months of her life spent sitting on lids
as she sips on her milk, nostrils sniffing up shit
banging her head on toilet-roll dispensers
i wonder whether these public-loo feeds offend her
’cos i’m getting tired of discretion and being polite
as my baby’s first sips are drowned drenched in shite
i spent the first feeding months of her beautiful life
feeling nervous and awkward and wanting everything right;
surrounded by family till i stepped out the house
it took me eight weeks to get the confidence to go into town
now the comments around me cut like a knife
as i rush into cubicles feeling nothing like nice
because i’m giving her milk that’s not in a bottle
wishing the cocaine-generation white powder would topple
i see pyramid-sales pitches across our green globe
and female breasts banned - unless they’re out just for show.
and the more i go out, the more i can’t stand it
walk into town, feel i’m surrounded by bandits,
’cos in this country of billboards covered in tits
and family newsagents’ magazines full of it
whsmith top shelves out for men
— why then don’t you complain about them?
in this country of billboards covered in tits
and family newsagents’ magazines full of it
whsmith top shelves out for men
i’m getting embarrassed
in case a small flash of flesh might offend
and i don’t want to parade this, i’m not trying to make a show
but when i’m told i’d be better just staying at home
and when another friend i know is thrown off a bus
and another one told to get out of the pub
and i’m sure the milk-makers love all the fuss
all the cussing and worry and looks of disgust
as another mother turns from nipples to powder

ashamed or embarrassed by comments around her
as i hold her head up and pull my cardie across
and she sips on the liquor made by everyone’s god
i think for god’s sake, jesus drank it, so did siddhartha
muhammed and moses and both of their fathers
ganesh and shiva and brighid and buddha
and i’m sure they weren’t doing it sniffing on piss
as their mothers sat embarrassed on cold toilet lids
in a country of billboards covered in tits
in a country of low-cut tops, cleavage and skin
in a country of cloth bags and recycling bins.
and as i desperately try to take all of this in
i hold up her head
i can’t get my head round the anger towards us
and not to the sounds of lorries off-loading formula milk
into countries where water runs dripping in filth
in towns where breasts are oases of life
now dried up in two-for-one offers enticed
by labels and logos and gold-standard rights
claiming breastmilk is healthier powdered and white
packaged and branded and sold at a price
so that nothing is free in this money-fuelled life
which is fine if you need it or prefer to use bottles
where water is clean and bacteria boiled
but in towns where they drown in pollution and sewage
bottled kids die
and they knew that they’d do it.
in towns where pennies are savoured like sweets
we’re now paying for one thing that has always been free
in towns empty of hospital beds
babies die, diarrhoea-fuelled – that breastmilk would end
so no more will i sit on these cold toilet lids
no matter how embarrassed i feel as she sips
’cos in this country of billboards covered in tits
i think i should try to get used to this