A brilliant, eccentric, unique voice with a range that encompasses childhood violence and a God who comes to therapy. Claire Scott’s lean, beautifully crafted language dares to be cynical about the world but is never without a deep compassion. These are poems that will be read over and over again as a seismograph of our time.

kim chernin, Author, In My Mother’s House, The Hungry Self

“Just a note to let you know how much I love your poems, and appreciate your work. That you highlight and embrace “the messiness of life in all its heavenly madness,” is indeed challenging—yet, helps us live a little closer to the truth.”

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trinae ross, Publisher, Stepping Stones Magazine
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Richard Stansberger, Poetry Editor, Red Savina Review
Waiting to be Called

Poems by Claire Scott
for John, forever
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Waiting to be Called

The light is too bright. This place
We have been seeking since birth

This heaven or nirvana or paradise
A promised land without shadows

Time suspended in dazzling light
Long ago shadows have curled up

Slunk away taking tomorrow
In their suitcases of what

Might have been, cumbrous
Cases filled with parts

Cast aside in fear or shame
Parts not ready to be claimed

Or yet to be discovered
Desire, anger, aggression,

Prejudice, tenderness, tears
All biding time in the steadfast shadow

Waiting to be called
Measuring

I measure each moment
With a silver yard stick

Meticulous, methodical
Exact measurement
   essential

Does the moment merit
Anger fear sorrow joy
   and how much
   especially how much

I keep my yard stick polished

Does a friend cancelling
A late supper measure
   three inches or seven

Does waiting for a test result
(Possible cancer per Dr. Stuart)
   merit all three feet

Or is that reserved for
Fire-blazed homes, ashes
   shrouding the past

the numbers clearly marked

And the death of a cat
Striped and sassy
   rescued years ago
   from a city shelter

How many tears
Before looking foolish
   friends frowning

Does a poem published
In a prestigious journal permit
   eighteen inches of ecstasy

easy reading for tired eyes
Or only two or five, avoiding
The embarrassment of no
further acceptances

How will I know without my
Silver yard stick, my constant
Companion that so precisely
Tells me what to feel.
Love

My love is no good
I have tried sweeping
Polishing, scrubbing
But it does no good
I have taken it for repair
A solemn doctor with
Round glasses investigates
Searching and sighing
A jeweler with a serious squint
Adjusts some screws
But it comes back the
Same as always
No good
I made my mother sick
With my no good love.
Every Sunday

Every Sunday my mother serves burnt lima beans doused in bitterness and butter. Her special recipe. We tumble in from church where my father sings Bach in the filtered light of stained glass saints. Us kids in the front row under the glare of his fixed eye. In our Sunday best we pinch and poke pretending to listen. She full of night’s pills and alcohol. Lumpy house coat askew.

Hair a-fly. Cook’s day off. Air thick with smoky resentment. My father clears his throat to say a wobbly grace. Us kids never sure exactly what we are grateful for. We sit to a bleak meal seasoned with spite. She rearranges her food, listless, vacant, twirling her hair. We stare at our plates of burnt beans. Us kids just sit, eyes down. No kicking under the table or sticking out silent tongues.

Every Sunday.
Murder

Yesterday I murdered mother,
or maybe the day before
possibly sometime after lunch
I tucked her Hermes scarf
around her crinkled neck
yanking satisfaction
fists tense, nails slicing
a kitchen knife chasing
eyes vacant as steel
daily drops of belladonna
dripping delirium
breath held in icy suspense
enemas burning, bursting
naked in a shivering tub
I shot her bloodless heart
exhaling each ripping blow
firing and firing ecstasy
hazy nights, drugged days
doors locked against a child
I hear slippered steps jerk and scuff
time for milky tea and toast
made by your daughter,
the one-eyed jack.
Scylla and Charybdis

Scylla: my father’s six-headed rules
three rows of teeth to keep you in line

Charybdis: my mother’s emotional tempest
uninhibited swallowing and belching

Like Odysseus, I chose Scylla
and a phantom limb aches with loss.
Knots

I was my father’s son ‘til I was twelve
Playing catch with leather gloves
In a browed-out field, just us two.
Feeling the satisfying whop
Of ball meeting glove,
My sisters left behind, redundant.
Off to tennis, racquets swinging
Dressed in matching whites
Hitting the ball back and forth
Back and forth, feeling the
Rhythm deep in our bodies.
We tiptoed past my mother
Easing softly out the door
Sharing the winks of thieves.
On rainy days he taught me
Sailor’s knots, tying and untying,
Tying and untying,
Sitting close, heads together.
Wanting to look into my eyes
And see himself shining back
A perfect father, a father who
Teaches his son skills, introduces
Him to the ways of the world.
Bowline, square knot, anchor hitch.
I hated knots, hated his insistence,
But I tied and retied
To be the one beside him
To be the one to please him
Then breasts betrayed, my spirit
Folded, no longer able to
Pretend. I almost lost him.
But when I turned thirteen
I became his wife.
Cats

But I was there, I saw it
Water swirling under the bridge
We stood on, my father and I
White foam licking bare rocks
Eddies churning, sucking
Cats curled in bags of stones
Twisted with twine
Father, how could you
I was three
It could have been me.
Uncle John

My Uncle John was bald and lived with his parents. My Mother said he drank. He didn’t seem to do anything. He never showed much interest in me, but then neither did my grandparents. I played alone in the cold echoing rooms.

Once my mother had him drive me to my grandparents’ summer cottage by the sea. He stopped the car. I remember the crunch of the leather seat. I remember my underpants were white. I was ten. The pungent smell of the Lincoln Continental. After, he drove fast. I watched the needle move upward, fascinated, petrified. One terror overlaying another.

Later I played cards with children at the beach. We played I Doubt It: a game of secrecy and lies. I felt the grip of the speedometer, stomach seizing, body shaking, the smell of leather fading.

Mother, you knew. You told us he was strange. You knew, Mother.