Plate

A plate puts on its tatty clothes –

gravy stockings, broccoli lingerie,

the odd pea for a nipple tassel.

You can clean a plate with hot water

and bubbles and virus-green washing-up liquid

but it still won’t be clean, it still won’t be

a credible plate. When I look at a plate

I see the scum in its cracks, where

the brown got in. I can feel the thick smear

of a mustard stain with my finger, or detect

a pimple that once was a peppercorn

with a simple thumb stroke. Sometimes,

after all that seeing and touching

there is shouting over my refusal to eat

lemon meringue or pasta bake off that plate.

I’m sure it would taste the same – sweet and crunchy and sharp

or cheesy savoury gloop – but once the finger speaks,

my mouths shuts its doors like a derelict pub. I salivate

at the scent of oil and vinegar creeping up the stairs

like a child squirreling a jam sandwich or a fistful

of custard creams. The sad thing is that once the plate

curses me with dirt I can’t even snaffle yellow moons

from a packet of ready salted, or lick the lid

of a yoghurt pot, because tasting is banned, plate or

no plate. When I was small my friend Ella would visit

and her sausages would fall off her plate onto the floor

with each tiny wiggle of a fork – my mum called them

*Flying Sausages*. We were about five or six and would later

become enemies of a prepubescent variety – she’s a ballerina

now, on a cruise ship, twirling like a soy sausage on china.

When I was eleven my friend Luke and I walked miles uphill

in sparkly black stilettos, sharing pick-n-mix for sustenance.

The following weekend I cried about a tuna mayo sandwich

from Greggs, received a premature accusation

of anorexia and *weirdo behaviour*.

If the plate is dirty, the gods you don’t believe in

have outlawed eating. If the cup is dirty, the gods are cruel,

and yes, gulping from a tap still counts, is illegal - we must suffer.

No rain no flowers. No water no girl. The dry tongue of truth.

Summer will kill us if we can’t find a better way to wash.

The pale sun plastering over my mouth, like it’s a hole

for mice, a moving germ. My mother lockpicking

with cans of fizz or water bottles. She says

I’m pig-headed, but that doesn’t explain the pain.

Soon I’ll smash plates like a Greek God.

Unleash prickly hail. I’ll eat out of bowls

and mugs and tuna tins like someone who has never met

a plate. I’ll eat all my pizza marinara off chopping boards.

All my spinach mezzelune from a sink.

That plate can cry like a fork on porcelain.