

Hilary Sideris

Maria & Tony

West Side Story made us ponder
love beyond the sprinklered
lawn we called our yard, wonder
if we'd be Jets or Sharks. Our aunt
& uncle had the same names
as the screwed protagonists

from warring gangs. Their marriage
was arranged. Our cousins were
Greek boys. We were just girls,
just half. Our father prayed, Jesus
came into his heart. Born Again,
he still hurled plates, made half-
moon dents in Mom's linoleum.

Sophia

Are you following so far?,
I asked my Russian-speaking
class as the Soviet Union
collapsed. Lyudmila said *of course,*
but why do you ask only Sofia?
meaning Sofia from Lvov,
whose name is still the world's

most popular for girls, wisdom
in Greek, which Socrates
said writers lack, especially
sophists. The Test of English
as a Foreign Language stumped
us all with multiple choice
author's intent questions.

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Hyenas

Born spotless with eyes open
& teeth intact, each cub drinks
only its mother's milk — not even

sisters cross-suckle. We snickered,
cackled in church when Reverend
Prather, a cat lover, slipped & said

tabby-nacle. Our father dubbed us
hyenas. Since then we've learned
from Wikipedia that alpha

females lead their clans, sporting
a pendulous clitoris (*pseudopenis*,
say Zoologists). Mom hissed

*That's enough, now you girls
listen to your dad!* but she too
laughed behind his back.

Posto di Merda

Thank God she's gone,
my husband whispered,
but she wasn't — that Roman
woman on her phone, who
promptly sat down next to me.

I thought I heard a sob on speaker.
Maybe her daughter?
Then she said *Non posso fare
niente!*, I can't do anything!
I'm on a plane to a shithole —

un posto di merda! The flight
attendant begged, *Signora,*
per favore! Spenga il cellulare!
Her Louis Vuitton, our Samsonite
rubbed zippers on the black

conveyor belt, steel carousel.
Do you know Athens? she said,
I've never been here.

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Vasco

Vasco means bathtub, as in *vasca da bagno*.
Vasco di Gamma sailed around the world.

Tonight Italian rocker Vasco Rossi plays.
We've reached the cordoned zone,

a tent city of hardcore fans. We're late
for Zia Maria's wedding on the Campidoglio.

My husband tells the cop he's handicapped,
a customary sob story. Her eyes are deep

brown pools. Our Cinquecento's radio
plays Brown Eyed girl. Van Morrison's

an anti-vaxxer now. Maybe not Vasco,
but his fans swarming the Circo Massimo —

the maximum circus — mess with her mind.
Maybe she likes a wedding story told

by a disabled man. My temples throb
vascularly. She waves us through.

Chios

My little sister Eleni drew Jack-O-Lanterns everywhere. She always sneezed four times. Dad shouted *That's enough!* after two sneezes, but Eleni didn't stop. We're both alive, Eleni and I, a kind of victory. Instead of Bless you, I still tell her *That's enough*. Our Yiayia Calliope came from Chios, an Aegean island where they grow mastic, as in masticate. This sticky sap was prized for sweets, pies, wine, chewing gum. Columbus used it to seal ships. He wrote his diaries in Byzantine Greek. Dad never mentioned priests with eyes gouged out, small human skulls in glass cases at Nea Moni monastery, commerce that thrived under the Genoese and Ottomans, *The Massacre* by Delacroix, how Byron died for the Hellenes. Eleni called them *punkin heads*. I watched him beat her with a belt after she carved them with her fork into our kitchen table's pine.