

DEAR MRS. HARRING,

I was at the bridal shower
to help my stepmom. It whirled
in the red house: cactus
cookies, ribbons with pink
hearts, little girls
in taffeta and tights.

Mrs. Harring, when you asked
if my children are
boys or girls I didn't
hesitate to answer.

I have two boys and
a nonbinary child. You
re-applied your lipstick.
I didn't think about
why my children weren't
invited or that

I shouldn't have been
there at all until
the pastor's wife
prayed my cousin would
"submit to her new husband
as to the lord." *Oh shit,*

I thought, *why hadn't I
seen it?* I was inside
the Tomas Tranströmer
poem that begins, *We are at
a party that doesn't love us.*

That's why the empty
appetizer plates seemed
so heavy. Mrs. Harring, after
I scrub them you saddle up
beside me as if
we're going for a ride,
me in dark jeans, you
in a modest dress
with columbine. Now
I'm on high alert,
shaking the party down
for signs and symbols
I missed in the opening
lines. The columbine
on your dress is said
to represent the sorrows
of Mary, mother of

Jesus. “We have
something in common,”
you say, “I have
a transgender child
but we kicked her out.”
“What—?” I say, unable
to believe you
said that. In the basement,
husbands bathe in the TV’s
blue light, a football
in someone’s arms.
Earlier I took them
chips and salsa, guacamole,
tater tots. Have you ever
stood between the floors?
You sip lemonade
and smile. A sea
of women in flowered
dresses surround us: yellow
roses, acanthus with its
flowering cross, white
lilies. Mrs. Haring,
have you considered
Jack-in-the-pulpit—
plant that can change
genders from year to year—
its spadix a preacher
with tiny greenish florets
inside an overhanging
lectern. What about fungi,
wisteria, and lavender?
We’ve always been here.
I don’t know what to say
except, “That must be
hard for you and
your child.” You nod as if
you hadn’t kicked her out.
The room whirled faster.
I closed my eyes. Then, as in
the *Magic Treehouse* books
I read with my children:
everything was still.
Absolutely still. When the
children climb down
the treehouse ladder,
rung after rung,
they descend into
a world that is not

the one they know. You
tell me, "God created man
and woman, day and
night, land and sea." Here is
our rebuttal. Dawn.
Dusk. Estuaries.
Marshes. After you leave
I hold my children.
We'll go down to the river
and play.