

A WOMAN WITH A CHAMELEON ON HER HAT

Why does she wear a chameleon
and why there? Why here?
Everyone is talking but her.
The women put their heads together
and speculate: *Is that her true color?*
Her hands are gloved, so we can't see them.
Carefully she unfolds a small
square of paper and reads it.
She nurses her drink.
She guards her secrets.
She is keeping her options open.

Everyone is drunk at this party.
It has been a hard year.
The chameleon is sleeping it off.
From across the room
a stranger has fallen in love.
He keeps thinking *gray-eyed Athena*,
for some reason, and can't stop.
If he told her of his love
the chameleon would wake, round
the brim of her hat, alert,
half dangerous, a new color.

Everyone has come to this party.
The world came, even the poor
dressed up. But who invited that woman?
She's from the outside, now
there's a strangeness among us.
And that thing is a lizard.
Sometimes it stands up pointing
its face, such a tense, immediate
presence, a contrast to everything.
Sometimes it lies low. Sometimes
it may not be there at all.

What does she observe that we don't?
The nearest fire exit – on planes,
the escape hatch to get out.
Does she know the whereabouts
of the unchartered fault lines.
No, no one knows.
She lights a cigarette and smokes
as if this were the 40s.
She dresses against fashion.
She never wears furs, she prefers
something living.

Her hat brim shadows her eyes.
When she tips back her head
they come out from under.
Her eyes are clear but you can't read them.
Why wear a chameleon?
Because everything is more than one color.
Because our lives keep changing
and we can't stop.

"NEVER WRITE A POEM ABOUT A WOMAN
WITH A CHAMELEON ON HER HAT."
- DAVID ST. JOHN



SUZANNE LUMMIS

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