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# Making Money, The Ugly Step Sister

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# Two Poems

DENISE DUHAMEL

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## Making Money

—for Maureen Seaton

It was Gertrude Stein who said  
she loved cold hard cash, but hated  
doing any of the things she had to do  
to get it. Consider phone sex,  
what it would be like for a woman  
who has been raped twice  
to whisper "Ooh baby, ooh,"  
into a mouth piece to a man  
who'd like to squeeze her wrists  
until they bruise. Consider teaching  
freshman composition at a community college,  
piles of notebook-fringed papers  
on your coffee table. After a while,  
getting mixed up yourself  
by the subjunctive for conjectures,  
the proper use of *was* and *were*. The donut shop  
is hiring, where you've worked before.  
The sweet smell of lard and sugar  
cooked into your skin. You could send away  
for a kit and become a television repairman.  
You could stuff envelopes, a penny apiece,  
in the privacy of your own home.  
Or dig out your pink-collar waitress uniform,  
the cashier's smock, or the factory apron.  
Why didn't you ever study accounting?  
You could get your other job back at the shoe store.  
You've already tried being a journalist,  
but could never really stick to the facts:  
describing the tragic car wreck as *cold metal death*.  
When you switched to just entering data,  
the computer screen made your eyes water.

When you were a candy striper,  
 you went home and cried  
 as though you knew the dying boy  
 personally. And that was only volunteer.  
 So I guess being a doctor is out.  
 Luckily, your mother is a nurse,  
 and so you'd have no white-dress fantasies,  
 she told you early, what it was really like.  
 Covering for the doctor's mistakes,  
 emptying out bedpans. Have you heard  
 about the latest scam, making money  
 in your spare time, as you sleep?  
 The *Assyrian Dream Book* claims  
 images of eating feces will bring wealth.  
 No prior experience required, but lucid dreaming is a plus.

## The Ugly Step Sister

You don't know what it was like.  
 My mother marries this bum who takes off on us,  
 after only a few months, leaving his little Cinderella  
 behind. Oh yes, Cindy will try to tell you  
 that her father died. She's like that, she's a martyr.  
 But between you and me, he took up  
 with a dame close to Cindy's age.  
 My mother never got a cent out of him  
 for child support. So that explains  
 why sometimes the old lady was gruff.  
 My sisters and I didn't mind Cindy at first,  
 but her relentless cheeriness soon took its toll.  
 She dragged the dirty clothes to one of Chelsea's  
 many laundromats. She was fond of talking  
 to mice and rats on the way. She loved doing dishes  
 and scrubbing walls, taking phone messages,  
 and cleaning toilet bowls. You know,  
 the kind of woman that makes the rest  
 of us look bad. My sisters and I  
 weren't paranoid, but we couldn't help  
 but see this manic love for housework  
 as part of Cindy's sinister plan. Our dates

would come to pick us up and Cindy'd pop out of the kitchen offering warm chocolate chip cookies. Critics often point to the fact that my sisters and I were dark and she was blond, implying jealousy on our part. But let me set the record straight. We have the empty bottles of Clairol's Nice 'n Easy to prove Cindy was a fake. She was what her shrink called a master manipulator. She loved people to feel bad for her—her favorite phrase was a faint "I don't mind. That's O.K." We should have known she'd marry Jeff Charming, the guy from our high school who went on to trade bonds. Cindy finagled her way into a private Christmas party on Wall Street, charging a little black dress at Barney's which she would have returned the next day if Jeff hadn't fallen head over heels. She claimed he took her on a horse and buggy ride through Central Park, that it was the most romantic evening of her life, even though she was home before midnight—a bit early, if you ask me, for Manhattan. It turned out that Jeff was seeing someone else and had to cover his tracks. But Cindy didn't let little things like another woman's happiness get in her way. She filled her glass slipper with champagne she had lifted from the Wall Street extravaganza. She toasted to Mr. Charming's coming around, which he did soon enough. At the wedding, some of Cindy's friends looked at my sisters and me with pity. The bride insisted that our bridesmaids' dresses should be pumpkin, which is a hard enough color for anyone to carry off. But let me assure you, we're all very happy now that Cindy's moved uptown. We've started a mail order business—cosmetics and perfumes. Just between you and me, there's quite a few bucks to be made on women's self-doubts. And though we don't like to gloat, we hear Cindy Charming isn't doing her aerobics anymore. It's rumored that she yells at the maid, then locks herself in her room, pressing hot match tips into her palm.