

ADDICTION

The game: TRI-TRYST. On the computer monitor
if I line up three, identical pieces, they vaporize.
I imagine not a Game Master, but a Game Mistress
behind the screen, tossing tile sets from her unseen hand.

Relentless. Merciless. Cascade of purple gem squares,
yellowish pearls, emeralds, or blue, red and lavender balls.
My mouse moves them onto a grid-patterned board and
I hear, “Ka-chunk.” When three align another sound pours

from the speakers as though burbling from the depths
of a cyber-optic bath. And then they vanish. Pleased
at the order, a rush heats my skin. Game pieces: Tiles
in sets of gems, candies, butterflies, pebbles or leaves.

The choice is mine. They drop onto the screen as single
pieces, doubles, triples or L-shapes. Some are illuminated
bonuses or nasty blockers. Game’s objective: Maneuver
each, brilliant piece with the mouse, flipping it with right

and left buttons until it fits. If aligned, they disappear
and the score builds. I lose when the Game Mistress sends
unreasonable combinations and blockers. The grids fill.
But defeat is swift, pain free. And I start anew.

Mid-morning, break time, I diminish the window with my work
and click on the game's icon. I select butterflies. As I catch
three vibrant-orange monarchs, the beating of their wings
fills my study. If they line up, they flutter away. When I lose
spider webs lock the grids. I've time for one more. Switch
the tile sets to leaves. Mostly green – hard to sort – they drift
down with passionate speed. If three are matched, they catch fire.
I lose when the grids freeze and everything turns to mushrooms.

Afternoon, drowsy from lunch, the game brings me back.
After a few minutes I'm alert. If I play at night, later in bed,
my eyes closed, shiny images appear and dissolve against
my eyeballs. What does this game do to me? I wonder

as I'm pulled into sleep. I wish I had read one of the books
stacked on the night table. There I place the urgent, must-read
hard covers by serious women, suffering because they loved
bad men, or a historian sorting out the ideas of John Adams,

or a science-trained writer tracking biological weapons.
The books mock the game. My addiction thwarts their
heating my skin with notions about missing lovers, the letters
of a dead president, or another worrisome apocalypse.

The books use guilt – a vapid weapon.

This game – this mistress friend – serves me into the night.
Even with deadlines, I cannot resist her lure. She is time killer,
usurper of energy. To end the lost hours I must un-install her,
silence her burbling gems, butterfly wings, burning leaves,

remove the tile sets of candies and pebbles. But before I do
this rash thing, I will play one last game. I will customize
it with bonus pieces set at “frequent” and indulge in an orgy
of time-wasting. I will endure into the night, hours without losing.

In this tournament: Mortal Woman versus Game Mistress –
the score will hit a million and we will keep going. Until we crash.

End