

Fate

for Sasha

I was negative 31 years old
when aging hippie/gypsy/label defying lady poet
was born months early, a full pound lighter than
my own barely over three pound birth weight,
at a time when technology was far less
advanced than it would be in 1976

when I, too, would struggle to draw in this
strange stuff called oxygen,
after my own too early expulsion
from water based world
where breathing occurred without effort.

My own, still unexpected, surpassing of medical expectations
left me with a moderate speech impairment,
using a power wheelchair to propel myself in the world,
and requiring 16 hours of state funded personal care assistance per day.

It's impossible not to wonder
how she inhales, ponders, enunciates, runs, authors, even is...
when, even today, parents often
still leave the hospital
with the phone number
of a neonatal death support group
instead of a baby.

Stranger than Fiction

Disclosure

I touch her in places she doesn't
permit most people to visualize
in the middle of this mad frenzy called sex.
I become aware of my broken physicality.
Muscles do not obey desires.
Recalcitrant fingers will not reach into her spaces.
I'm frustrated with body, with impairment, with self.

She smiles, takes disobedient hand in hers
and leads me into the center of her softness.
Fingers compliant now that they have something
tangible to guide them through this body's cavities.

Wait for familiar rhythms
of her body's pleasure finding
to build/climax/recede.

Follow her out of self.
Fingers intertwined.
I'm sticky with her.

She releases still moist fingers.
Her grin is gentle as she turns
to face me in tiny dorm bed.
"Thank you, that was awesome."

The words sting,
although I know she doesn't
mean them to.

I do not return her smile,
but she's too involved in post-orgasm haze
to notice.

Hours later,
my angry, adolescent poet self
recalls experience in verse.

Final stanza...
"Thank you for what?
I was about as necessary to this process
as a dildo."

Stranger than Fiction

Months pass.
Relationship deepens.
I come across poem
in monthly electronic file clean out ritual.

Decide to share.
Do not consider consequences.
She reads.

I wait, sweat, outside door
until summoned.
Wonder if honesty
really is the best policy.

She curls into lap,
eager for a cuddle
and a bit of reassurance.
I oblige... appease... speak softly.

Later,
once again in too small dorm bed,
I yield to sudden, acute desires.
“אהבה איתך לעשות רוצה אני”

I say, hoping my first semester Hebrew
is understandable to her far more practiced ear.
Knowing that when I ask for something
in the tongue she still calls native,
I usually get what I want.

She agrees.
Her only caveat,
“Go slowly, please.”

I slide tongue down her dry flesh,
pausing at the more interesting bits
and dive greedily into the moisture
she carries between her thighs.

I feel her shudder
a moment before the sobs
that will continue,
our mutual hearts breaking, for hours.

Stranger than Fiction

This is Us

You drove me to the Montague Bookmill
in the van I rented to get to far away work
at a festival, the next day.

We wondered among dusty books,
ate artisan grilled cheese sandwiches
though yours was made out of something called Sheese,
a substance that- as much as I love you-
I never plan to ingest.

All smiles by the waterfall
as years melted and you and I were 20 and 19, again.
Moment eluded capture by
both my digital camera and your phone.

After at least 11 attempts some stranger
took pity on our poor photographic prowess
and volunteered to take the picture for us
arresting a piercing glance between us for posterity.

One of those looks that promised other things
when the somewhere we were
wasn't so public.

Yet, after another night of the arguments we can't seem
to avoid, despite repeatedly declaring ourselves,
"Grown ass people who are over all our college crap."
We were back to barely speaking.

Suddenly, you coming to work with me-
despite my desperate need of an extra pair of hands,
welcoming smile for whatever audience I drew,
and an amplifier to my over quiet, neurologically impaired, voice
which becomes automatically softer when called on to be louder-
seemed likely to become one more
in the endless series of mistakes
you and I make when we opt to make
another run at being "us".

You choose to stay home
and meet up someone from the internet
and engage in I've decided
I never want to know when, or what
(as long as it wasn't in my house
or with anyone I see regularly).

Exhale slowly.
Mutter, “Whatever...”

Exit without good-bye.

Stranger than Fiction

Acknowledgement

(a poem in honor of Matthew Shepard)

I can't escape you,
even when I opt to retreat
into childhood bedroom
to hide under navy blue, ultra soft, unicorn embroidered
security blanket I've had since before my 12th birthday.
in effort to forget.

You invade my TV,
day after day, hour after hour
newscasters interrupt every show
from *Touched by an Angel* to *Homicide: Life on the Street*
to update your always critical condition.

Cameras never filmed you
hospitalized/bandaged/broken,
but my mind remembers beholding
elegant... slender... peaches and cream...
all bruised and battered.

Little remains visible
of the empyrean face I suspect
drove all those closeted, collegiate, cowboys crazy.
Calvin Klein calendar caliber good looks
are invitations to some bigots' blows.

Your limbs are trapped in traction and immobilizers.
Your silence alarms me as such devices
cause people with even the barest brain function
to moan in pitches barely recognizable as human.

Even so, I continued to invoke
swarms of prayers for your survival.
Bet against doctor after doctor's prediction.
Joined legions of disability rights activists plotting your
escape from whatever institution the lab coats tell your parents'
is the best warehouse, given the situation.

All you needed to do is survive and
we'd find you; teach you the skills needed to
achieve the life you desire
inside your newly damaged flesh.

One day, hourly sound bite brought news
I didn't want, but couldn't ignore.
A doctor, in tears, informed me
you died at 12:53 AM.

Apology to a Presumed Bigot

(dedicated to the rancher on whose land the Matthew Shepard incident occurred)

I always assumed you knew
not encouraged, but knew
two testosterone driven twenty-one-year-olds-
barely old enough to buy beer or be labeled men-
were turning your ranch into site of our country's
most notorious gay bashing over 15 years ago.

You must have
heard the pleading,
the beating,
the sobbing,
and elected to do nothing,
not even dial 9-1-1.

Then I snuck into your land-
leaving a poem I hope you found-
and discovered I didn't comprehend
how different Wyoming land layouts
were from those in New England.

How far was the safety of your house from the horror?
It must've been miles,
almost more than I could perceive,
for my eyes never left your door,
as I sat near site of now forever downed fence.

The level of racket made by one brown skinned poet
in daylight, with a 500 pound power wheelchair,
modified van, and 3 person entourage,
never got as much as a head to emerge and inquire.

I realized Mathew might've spent hours
screaming, screaming, screaming
until his insides bled from the effort
as well as his injuries
and you would hear him no more easily than me.