

## *The Massage & Other Poems*

### **The Massage**

Her full breath whispers over me  
the quiet crack of gum  
from her young jaws  
this grown-up body on her white sheets  
Snatam Kaur playing in the background

My brother showed me  
A picture of Jimmy's gravestone  
situated not far from our grandparent's plot  
on the grass hill  
above town  
where I once saw a Killdeer drag its wing through a dusty sand pile

I hadn't seen Jimmy's grave in many years

My brother said they think he killed himself  
Because of his *sexuality*

His pretty face

He *was* pretty  
he wore his corduroy pants well  
and played the electric guitar in a band with my brother  
his hair was a pageboy  
just off blonde

He lived in a room in lower part of the house  
with his own entrance

Jimmy brought me a magnum of champagne  
and muffins he'd baked  
we ate them on a blanket

next to an AM radio

In the dark at the lake  
beside some empty cabins  
the little-known swimming hole  
His young body  
tough and tight like a car  
the most beautiful penis I would ever touch  
while the flag tap-tapped the flag pole in the wind  
and pointed up to the planets  
and the stars  
what a warm summer night it was

*So this is what it's meant to feel like*

Her hands on my body smell like burning wood  
hands meant to heal  
yet always keeping their distance

She is young, she is squeaky, she appears without desire  
for anything, but...

She knows the muscles, the tendons, the *interstitium*  
that newest human organ

It is the same week after week since the accident  
since the court recommended her services  
two years ago

Here on these white sheets  
there is never a dull moment

I hear a merry go round  
in the odd far distance  
the horses are prancing  
round Jimmy's hair in the starry night light

Prancing down the dirt road  
beside the lake  
*two young bodies*

Yes, the band played on  
I guess you could say that...  
the band played on

## **This Is The Story She Told**

That the streets were like the streets now everywhere  
an intermix of great buildings paper shacks many too many people  
each waiting for a slight or a lie  
each hoping for a fight  
or at least to witness one  
bare fistful rocks  
bullets from nowhere  
ransoms paid in galvanized pails  
kidnapped men and women of faith hung by their ears  
their robes bloody in the breeze

In the midst of all this  
that was now JUST THE WAY IT IS  
a virus spread its spinning tentacles  
a vendetta arose over a poisoned soup  
a locket with an infinity sign snatched  
a fat baby in pink leather booties  
REMOVED  
from wealthy parents of mixed race  
while - she told me - she was watching the child  
in the park  
such as it was with filth

The soup reached its destination and the gifted one  
died in most agony with a mushroom on his tongue

Locket sold on corner for single pill  
virus reached into the basement and snuck up the ever-wide staircase  
to the penthouse  
where the couple waited for word from law enforcement  
SUCH AS IT WAS  
on their baby girl

An intermix of great buildings and many too many people  
in a land once admired  
A land of fish and water  
scholars and lovers  
She sat by the last stream  
a trickle through the gutter  
and prayed to wake from this terrible dream

## What She Spent

you always know you're in NY  
the banging and hammering  
of further future development  
the grey windy walks of people  
the honking

hand flutters in air  
like a hawk  
to emphasize  
*windy walks*

the whine of a saw  
the construction from up above  
and in this case – directly across

breeze blows the Hilton's curtains  
where I'm staying  
another white spring morning  
like just before she jumped  
last week

music neatly lines her walls  
books on meditation  
and birds  
Mid Century Modern  
and her prestigious awards  
her bi-coastal bi life

one book open to one last page

what does years of therapy cost  
to the pocketbook  
showers of gold from over a windowsill?

how was all the money  
spent -  
collectables, intake, out take

take out  
tattoos and white stuff  
that shitty liquor store  
across the street

do you recognize this woman  
I press a picture on the counter  
when's the last time you saw  
her

*what are you – a cop?*  
did she purchase this  
I hold up a bottle of wine  
or this – dumpy Svedka

the stiff dick of a doorman  
thinks he owns this block  
of the East Village  
*I'm not meant to talk to you -*  
he says  
but he told me the SUV was a wreck  
no one would want it now  
with that sailing gray matter  
ruinous mess  
what with dents and all

and how do you know  
she wasn't pushed  
*oh what are you – the sheriff?*  
by the husband of the wife  
she was schtupping you mean?  
oh they're on that

the ship is gone  
poof  
it left a few days ago  
but the mail gets delivered  
by Maria  
she's from Jamaica  
and is saving to go home

## **This Is My Body Now**

The rain overflows the gutters  
as I pack to go to another country

And there, thinking I am an American  
they speak Flemish behind my back  
Their low tones insult me  
As they eye me

I *am* an American  
but pretend to be a Canadian  
who understands them  
And leaves their sweetshop in a huff

I look back at the shop window  
with a snarl  
only to see *me* reflected there  
my white raincoat  
and the two shopkeepers  
going about their business

Americans are hated everywhere  
rain or shine  
And so, like a standup comedian  
I look right left and right again  
as I work on new material

I can't help where I was born

I cross many cobbled streets  
then a road to a wooded path  
that leads to the border  
As I approach the wall beyond, I see the turrets  
and wire  
a ladder  
and the men up top

I am in the dark now  
I avoid things that crack beneath my feet  
Voices  
Their language  
German  
Snap  
and I am in the light  
A big spot of light

This has never happened to me before  
An over-exuberance of attention  
With more to come

But this is not a joke  
Not a re-enactment of John Le Carre  
or Graham Greene  
This really happens

The ladder up is no way out  
and slinking under a bush  
like a scared arrogant rodent  
not so good

So, I stand firm

I try this when the khakis catch up  
with me  
*"I am just a lady beyond by my prime.  
A birder.  
I went down the wrong path  
and tripped, honest.*

They don't speak American  
or Canadian  
And now I do have to climb the ladder  
to see the Commandant  
who sits in green pants  
in a small green room  
with a green light  
and a bottle of something greenish

Which he offers me

I admit I'm not a birder  
I came to the land of my Flemish ancestors  
to look at the sights  
And felt unnoticed and alone  
I took the wrong path  
fell  
And want to go home

*Sie denken, Sie sind eine Kluge Frau*  
You think you smart lady, huh, he says  
As the rain begins to fall

## **Black Cap**

My dad was in the garden again  
It was early this morning  
Singing that song over and over  
He wore a little black cap  
And could fit in my hand  
His heart of a heart banging away  
I listened  
I listened  
I turned my head this way and that  
Like a dog  
But I couldn't make it out  
Was he looking for his pipe  
Was he tired of the snow  
Was he calling for someone  
Someone I know?