

MIDLIFE SOUTH OF THE MIDRIF

She:

I say I will come to your place
Wearing parrot attire,
Or nothing under my coat.
I'd look like a striptease dancer,
Miss Chastity from Soho's Gwynne Club
In a vintage documentary you liked
On dangerousminds.com.
I tell you I'll do the Coffee Grinder
Much better than the stiff Miss Carmen,
I'll perform the Quiver & Shimmer
Way better than the humdrum Miss Cher.

I try on orange stockings, green skirt, red belt.
It's not the colorful cackle
Rising in the mirror that confounds me,
But rather, the Miss Chastity outfit
Highlights the dark circles under my eyes
More than my fetching glance.
So I dress quieter, safer.
Gray jacket, black top.
I chicken out of wearing
Nothing under my coat.

Astride you, I look as absurd
As duck-nosed Miss Carmen suckling a poodle
Whose tenth generation descendants, pink-leashed,
Now pee on London's rowans and planes;
Miss Carmen must be in her sixties by now,
If she didn't die young of AIDS.
By and by, my feet warm up,
Thigh rippling subsides
As the monthly ovum express
Steams through my groin.

Now I don't ride you
But this fatuous vehicle of my own manufacture.
I fly it like a witch on a broom,
Beyond reach of the daily precipitation:
Peevish spouse, tight schedule, teen progeny, skilletts,
Skeletons yawning unused in the cupboards.

Troposphere, stratosphere, mesosphere, thermosphere,
The eggshell hardens
Into a happy asteroid B-613,
Withheld from the Little Prince
By his author, the pilot.
And although we already have five,
To count yours and mine,
I mesh our genes in my mind
Braiding an invincible DNA, this time,
Resistant to moral and bargains.

But just ten days later, B-613 makes its descent,
Plummeting into a rusty puddle.
The dead thing smells
Of iron and vertisol.
I wrap it in a white cotton cloud
And bury it, according to communal law,
In its appropriate mass grave
Of the gray garbage container, residual waste,
In which there also rest in peace
Ashes, cigarette butts and old household objects
Like hairbrushes and cutlery.

On its futile two day journey,
The ovum in heat didn't leak a drop
About the number of its kind
Still sitting patiently, ready to start their flight
From my hangar.

He:

She came wearing gray again,
Although she had promised parrot colors
Or nothing under her coat.
(She takes any shitty link I send her out of boredom
For sacred. Now she thinks she can dance striptease.)

A svelte female shape prone on the wardrobe
Made of gauze and potato starch;
It's her, a decade ago;
I remember messing up the first mould –
We were too lustful to wait for the starch to dry.
I tore the gauze, and slid
Into the sticky white heat.

She wouldn't fit into the shape, not anymore.
Neither has any atom that made her up
A decade ago, survived.

She gives up her striptease intentions at once.
Too stiff, too heavy, too shy.
Her navel winks at me guiltily
From the folds of her belly.
So she just picks gray stalks
In the wheat of my chest.
A pinched nerve on my thigh
Bleaches the thrill of her fingers to whisper.

I can sustain grunt work for a minute.
(Shit, I hope I didn't knock her up.)
A decade ago, I wouldn't have cared if she'd got enough,
But now I oblige. My hands finish the task
Without much verve
But also without a grudge.

New ailments respond to medication
With fresh obedience, like to a new strict teacher.
Beta blockers say, blood pressure, sink, and it sinks.
Triptan says, migraine, stop, and it stops.
RectiCare says, piles, detumescence, and they do.
But lumbago is nasty.
Soma can't bend it; even Vicodin fails.
The brute needs a living, loving assassin.

She is on the rise.
Wet storm, steam bath,
Meringue crumbs on Key Lime Pie.
Now do what I say.
With your hands akimbo,
Place them on either flank
Of the lumbar spine,
And go from side to side.
Oh, your hands are like opiates.
My back's an addict, don't stop...

I wish you had groaned like this, she sighs,
When you came.