

## MY CLAIM TO FAME

My claim to fame – I had breakfast with him  
and his second wife  
now replaced by another  
blond young thing.  
Pancakes and coffee  
fragrant as the songbird morning  
of his words.

Once, He sat on my couch, the other poet  
spoke  
(between the Boursin-spread cracker mouthfuls and the sips of wine)  
of how women's poetry just wasn't  
strong enough  
didn't make 'statements'. His own whining,  
drumbeating body-painting  
male-  
bonding ceremonies in the woods  
notwithstanding.

The Nobel prize-winner too  
came to dinner once,  
his childhood rape  
sticky fly-feet stuck in memory, but  
never grew wings on any of the women in his novels,  
made their lives  
real.

I need  
today  
to ward away  
such memories, unseat  
them, send them off in their fur-lined coats  
into the snowy night. I need  
to write  
my own mornings,  
the hot sweet coffee, crumbling rolls,  
the frantic flying cockroaches and smashed dishes of  
a Bronx back kitchen.

I want to watch our breath float again in the winter air  
while we sing wild choruses, sailing to Bear Mountain,  
standing room only at the opera, love affairs with tall hard men, flying  
across the mountains of Afghanistan

to land in a village in the tribal wilds of India  
surely  
must count for something —  
my words

my claim  
to fame.

## I, TOO

The famous poet  
speaks of strawberries —  
how he rejoices in them  
and the sensuous  
bodies of women,

and is praised.

I too can find pleasure  
in fruit,  
the purple-tongued, juicy  
blueberries of a Catskill summer  
picking their memories from the high field bushes  
acid, longingly sweet  
our women's / girls' bodies  
sunlit, warm.

## SONS

*in memory of Loraine and for Heather*

The eldest daughter  
lay herself down along her now-dead mother  
old arguments forgotten, put  
aside, her sad self  
at the fore, her life  
a riddle, still.

While all around her brothers squabbled,  
ordered, scoffed and simmered  
all around,  
gave orders to their sisters, to each other,  
unable to offer solace  
to their living mother or  
now, any sister, or  
themselves.

Kept muttering  
about wills, and houses ,  
paintings, books, and trinkets  
while scolding  
sisters, one as always, silent,  
one still sobbing in her mother's hair.

In my hospital room  
my son, too full of pain, perhaps,  
sat , never noticing the built-in window-bed for family,  
(complaining later to me of how long  
he had to wait for me to breathe,  
to wake.)  
He sat  
in corridors, in anguish  
in indelible childhood memory  
when his mother screamed  
and ranted, picked her way around from wall to leaning wall

while his father, interminable wordsmith  
had no words  
no arms to comfort or console,  
no concern but for his  
having to suffer more

by watching  
his wife suffer.

Remembering perhaps  
his doctor father always having time  
to tend to others, had kind words  
for those others.

(He too complained  
to a limp form of me in a different  
hospital bed, arms strung with tubes  
and piping, and fear.)

Perhaps fear  
is what's at the heart of it.  
Sons can't  
fear, can't  
show lack of control, or  
make sense  
of the senseless.

Daughters  
sit,  
quietly  
lie  
quietly,  
close by

face in her disheveled hair  
to better hear

even a whispered word.

## DON'T GET TOO COMFORTABLE

Don't get too comfortable  
You won't be here  
forever  
Don't go and unpack  
all your rickrack undies  
This is a way station  
You are in a shabby  
limbo

Soon the trials  
will get started Every day  
they'll question you  
You'll  
question yourself  
every day, every hour.

At first, as usual, the birds will  
whistle and sing in the early  
mornings; then they'll start  
flying off, to the South  
to the North, to those places  
you've not even seen in your  
dreams

Once, perhaps in a dream, you will  
be that bird  
Soaring,  
over green fields to a distant  
hill, you will  
own the meadows.

But, don't get  
too comfortable.  
The is just a  
way station.,

You won't be  
here tomorrow.

## A PLACE TO GET STRANDED

No sign of hope here  
nothing but dust and overheated sky  
You don't decide to come here  
This is a place you get stranded

Even if it rains, dust settles again  
on all that might have greened  
Dreams drown  
in a sea of sweat  
you cannot lift your head  
These days  
you turn away  
your face  
your body  
the reveries of your whimsical worlds

This is a boneyard of dust  
A place to get stranded

Here gnarled trees, stunted  
and sparse  
drop desiccated leaves in a river of dust  
Yesterday great humped aurochs grazed here  
The smack of the herder's stick resounded in these rocky hills  
The tinkle of bangles and rustle of long skirts vied with leafy treetops  
Someone heard

Someone must have heard  
Buddha's sermon here  
He would have passed through here  
slaked his thirst here from this now scorched river of stones  
monks debated here  
inscribed their breathing cave murals here

Here the serenity of his countenance  
graced  
an ancient green peace

Now this too a graveyard of shards, a place  
to get stranded  
The litter of self-satisfied glee has split the blue of heaven  
the shrapnel of smashed stone and denial jagged  
as Hitler's rage —  
a place to get stranded.

A place without glory  
This is a place to get stranded  
a place to bomb school buses  
to shatter lives, to pretend  
to sacrifice yourself for a womanless paradise  
a garden of rough beards and armpits  
a new breed of monks, sweaty and loveless  
boy-men sitting around fondling their whips  
waiting in unwashed undershirts for the messiah —  
  
a place to get stranded.

*for Bamiyan, for Khotan, for MoGao, for all the razed temples and holy stones in all  
the evangelized and invaded lands*

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