

We've Come A Long Way

Carmien Michels

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p 7-8

Carmien (‘kɑ:maɪn) n. song or poem that comes about by accident

A nipple in my ear
just after the big bang
I heard my mother whisper
soothingly
that I was a sweet poem

young creatures
fit any mould
at drama school I learned to play Ping-Pong
with Dora's Ps

Pain
Pleasure
Personality
Perversion
Poetry

Picked what I expected they expected
the metier of self-pity

Always thought I was a misprint
better to have stayed in the womb
until I stopped laughing and started missing myself

Broken dikes, on the verge of bursting
I crept back into my birth book again
by now a competent reader of lips
thanks to years of collisions with unnamed mistresses
their nipples in my ear

There I re-read my mother's fateful whisper
poetry abandoned
soothingly
saying I was a sweetie pie

Bed

The bed in which we don't fit
forces us to lie down
so that we meet the frame

Arm flattened beneath torso
neck pressed against headboard
toes folded in lotus position

Where buttock spills from bed
or shoulder blade reaches the edge
the bed calls pitilessly
for the precision saw

Excess skin fat bones
flop on top of intercepted thoughts
and trimmed labia

Don't think that when
we leave the bed we can just
put them on again
like clothes
forgotten in the pub

What once fitted like a glove
suppurates in our conscience
there where we betrayed
the bed in its most intimate springs

Phantom pain in places
where we chose limbs
over membership
peeing is no longer the same

Polish our bodies
scrub our insides
cut deserters out of our lexicon

We want to be the mattress
the hardcore base of this civilised bed
which we worship above all else

British Grannies

The British lady
who went ballroom dancing on Sundays
coming that way by her weekly shag
in the Royal Festival Hall

Swishing her artificial hip
old goats are horniest around noon

Eyes twinkling pinching young waiters
in their parts of the world
cheek bulging with her tongue
stuffing tips in their perplexed palms
promises of pink back rooms

I had to swear to my friend I'd never
write about the ball-pincher
nor about her libertine girlish grin
cycling for the first time without help
honk honk in those lads' tooters
it was her gran

I swore that otherwise acid would dissolve me
dripping from the corners of my mouth down my chin
taking away my tongue and
my chance to sign contracts worth millions
for poems like these
without saliva stains

Many years passed
my friend's address drowned
in a yellow sea of costly censorship
I'm selling my unsent letters
as readymade wash-mitts
grabbing granny sent a postcard
greetings from Compostela

My mother my daughter

That dream in which I was pregnant
with my own mum
didn't dare call her about it

Or when my dad said
I want to be a girl

Finally I said
rubbing my belly
to check
whether my mum had heard

She kicked harder than ever
until my dad
crimped and his smile
cramped

Family Weekend

My dad tied to a totem pole
we play football and aim at his glasses
he whimpers in a trance about the boa in the bath
when he was a boy in the Congo

My cousin scores an own goal
falls down with hands on crotch
a missionary standing where the pole's shadow
reaches the apple tree nods at my dad

Men and boys sweat girls don't
the sun dribbles between the clouds
there's no snake slithering through the grass

City of Multiplication

There's a bedside table beside the lamppost on the square
next to it a mattress with a damp patch
the imprint of a child
daylight dries the wet dreams of
whoever left their bedroom here

A woman waters her geraniums on a balcony
a tramp with a bar of soap hums beneath the drops
in a future life he's Piaf

A group of old people wave at statues as though they're alive
the busker at the fountain blares out:
in every stone I see my wife
fifty years ago when her legs were still
smooth and lithe

The tramp hums on undisturbed
the elderly have disappeared from the song
the geranium lady pokes a finger into the soil
still two pots to go
