

# *Marvelous Pursuits*

Poetry by Barbara Goldberg

## ***THEME***

(Quartet)

A man with two mistresses  
Desires nothing but peace and tranquility;  
He suffers if they should quarrel,  
Preferring their foreheads unwrinkled.

One day he receives a letter.  
The words leap out in bold typeface:  
Cuckold, Cuckold, Cuckold -  
More to Follow,  
A neighbor.

I can't imagine who sent it!  
He is obsessed by curiosity.  
Which neighbor?  
Which mistress?  
Which neighbor?  
Which mistress?  
Mistress  
Neighbor  
Neighbor  
Mistress  
Mistress  
Neighbor  
Neighbor  
Mistress  
Which?  
Which?  
Which?

Cuckold  
Cuckold  
Cuckold!

## ***PARALLEL MOTION***

(Rosa and Blanca)

Both mistresses occupy luxury flats.  
Rosa's is furnished in bone white and black,  
Blanca's in all shades of rose.  
Rosa and Blanca, like two sisters;  
I, Rosa, am naughty and hot,  
Quick to anger;  
And I, Blanca,  
Am plump and luxuriant.

One day in my luxury flat  
I sit on my plush settee,  
Puff slowly on a cigarillo,  
My fingers caressing the keys  
Of the old Royal typewriter.

Soon I will put on my poncho  
Take an afternoon stroll to the maildrop.

## *WANTON MODULATINS*

Quartet

The hydrangea having never been so purple  
as this particular year,  
The hydrangea cast purple shadows  
on the cobbled walk  
Which leads to the front porch  
of the house on Pompano Street  
Where Marta rocks in rhythmic frenzy,  
Rocks in rhythmic frenzy,  
Rocks in rhythmic frenzy,  
Frenzy, Frenzy,  
On slats that slope and creak  
from dry rot.

This morning as her husband donned  
His starched white shirt,  
She noted purple bruises on his shoulder  
blades,  
Like dark cherries,  
A message from one of his two mistresses,  
Intended for her eyes alone.

Jealous?  
No!  
She knows  
To him she is the one who darns his black  
silk socks,  
Who takes too lax a hand with kitchen maids  
Who fail to dust the kitchen to perfection

Let him dwell on youthful breasts,  
On sweet abundant flesh  
Of those who hold him gaily.  
Daily, she bids her spouse a grey farewell,  
Retires to the rocker,  
Her faded housedress a once-wild floral  
print.  
In undergarments clean and frilly  
She awaits the piano tuner  
Who comes faithfully at noon,  
When cobbles on the walkway are their own  
color.

## *CAVATINA*

Piano tuner and Marta

The piano tuner  
Never comes empty-handed;  
Today he brings a tiny tart  
of marzipan and raspberries.  
Perched sedately on white wicker,  
He observes formalities,  
Inquires of the kitchen maids,  
Their foolish superstitions.

And I tell in tremulous trill  
of the wounded bird in the larder,  
How I myself released it.

The piano,  
He asks,  
How has it been behaving?  
He plays a slow arpeggio, cocks  
an ear for off-key tones.  
He has his way  
With strings,  
Tunes them taught,  
Or slack,  
Until, until,  
Until each note rings out  
According to its true pitch.

## ***REFRAIN***

(Quartet)

The piano tuner's mother  
Foretells the weather.  
Like a bullfrog  
Her arthritic hip  
Predicts rain.  
Nothing, nothing, nothing  
Nothing to be done  
But take a trip to the doctor  
Who packs her in medicinal mud  
Imported from Ischia.

Alas, alas,  
It has come to this...  
Athletic limbs  
that danced 'til daybreak  
Now paddle about in support hose.

Of late, she's taken to her rosary,  
and a small nip of sherry before Vespers.  
Her angelic son,  
Runt of the litter,  
Plays Scarlatti after sunset,  
Balding pate glowing  
Like an unhatched egg.

## ***INVERTED TURN***

Male duo, female duo, quartet

In cold-blooded haste,  
I break off contact with my two mistresses;  
He breaks off contact,  
Takes a chamois cloth  
And polishes his wingtips,  
Revealing the tiny pinpricks  
Like pores in the nose of the shoe,  
Visible as the blue tatoo  
Of a songbird, a thrush  
on my chest.  
Marta, forever, indelible,  
Inscribed just yesterday  
On my willing flesh.  
Marta forever, forever, forever.

Overcome by fever,  
He must take to bed,  
Advised by doctors  
To abstain from physical exertion,  
To fight the strain of infection.  
Marta shuffles in slippers,  
Brings fruit juice,  
Wraps his wound.  
If she feels desolate,  
She doesn't show it,  
For her affair, exposed,  
Thus ruined, ruined, ruined.

His (my) wife,  
So recently reviled and scorned,  
By infidelity transformed,  
Becomes the object of his single-minded  
lust.  
She once filled him (me) with disgust,  
But viewed in betrayal's light  
Is suddenly, irresistably, dear.

## **CAPRICE**

Rosa & Blanca

Even hard-working girls as we  
Deserve a vacation,  
A respite in perfect luxury.

How pleasant it is to relax supine,  
Our bodies stretched out beneath the  
sun,  
Our bodies belonging to no one.

A circular brick wall  
Permits this feline world  
Of curve and claw,  
Where orchids bloom,  
Multitudinous as weeds  
Concealed from marauders  
Their scorched eyes.

Even hard-working girls as we  
Deserve a vacation,  
A respite in perfect luxury.

How pleasant it is to relax supine,  
Our bodies belonging to no one, to no  
one.

## ***CAPITULATION***

Quartet

For now we all live in peace and tranquility;  
The orchids bloom, multitudinous as weeds,  
The hydrangea cast purple shadows.

For now our foreheads are wholly  
unwrinkled,  
For now we all live in peace and tranquility,  
For now, for now, for now...