

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...