

REAL PRINCESSES KISS FROGS

I

His ring came home packaged as hazardous waste.
On a good day,
he read Descartes and wondered if we were real,
my destructive husband.
But if he loved to hurt his wife for fun,
is now all one.
And if he judged by his contempt for others,
no longer matters.

Even a brisk, modern sort of undoing,
forbidding wails of protest at the injustice
of it all, may purify, exalt
to martyrdom the waxy figure, carved
and recarved, fitted with sterile, plastic parts.
So modern schoolmarms speak of dying children,
“He has had his trip to Disneyland.”

Some experimental funding paid,
and finally, of course, the coverage,
invoked to render out the last bit
of goody from the hapless case. (Admitted,
all martyrdom must be expedient
to any torturer, a deer to the hunter
chasing his childhood dreams a week a year.)

So he rose again as Everyman,
without peculiar faults, relieved utterly
of personal responsibility,
invested with the wishes of consolers,
a shape to be colored in with their own dolors.

II

“Male and female created He them.”
We remained, but the Garden has darkened:
as rumors spread from empty caves
on the Dead Sea
to my Celtic people
that Eve’s rebellious appetite
for knowledge authored her subjection,
her husband’s discontent,

and the knowing thought of death.

Assumption of guilt is the price we pay
for our illusion of control,
as nature and morality
fall weeping in each other's arms.

"All flesh is grass," the Hebrew preacher
gallantly proposed.
"But Eden means our suffering
is wrong, and sacrifice
required to put it right," breathes soul,
willfully unwise.

III

Hermitage and sacrifice,
the basic drives we call upon,
our backs to the wall, can placate gods
and men and even keep the goblins
on the dark side of the window.

"Je vis comme si," confessed a bitter scholar,
who saw at last he gave himself away
to live with alien tribes whose faith in magic
he could hardly share.
And if our sister hadn't died at Aulis,
Troy and all the heroes
had turned to arts of peace.

IV

I still prefer the sail to the landing,
for everyone the self-same ending.
All Moses got was a glimpse,
and that of a barren place.
All rising's by a winding way;
the switchbacks are essential.

So Eden's twilight was our dawn.
To know we know sets us apart
from other beasts who put each other
on the plate like the innocent bear,
take a chicken like the forthright fox.

But knowingly to waste, to spoil,
whether the means is a bomb or a lie,
is doing evil since our rise
to grace from mindless life in paradise.

V

Our pets have not the beautiful
and dangerous gift of tongues.
Mea culpa, I have loved
my horses and my hounds
more than my violent husband.

VI

A married woman is a colonized city,
a land under the Romans.
“Render unto Caesar,” and “the meek
shall inherit,” not Caesar’s sons:
the desperate faith of slave and proper woman.
A martyr’s victory of silent stillness,
who never lost because we never strove,
were never wrong because we never spoke,
smacks of sour grapes (Aesop’s or
the Bible’s, take your pick.) And what is more,
to win belief in the impossible
may gain control of the believer’s soul.

So the more unlikely side of the story,
opposed to what we know,
always becomes established orthodoxy:
transubstantiation, metamorphosis.
So marriage goes in the Land of Litotes,
believing way too much in the power of a kiss.