

THE WAY TO LARISSA, A DIALOGUE
(Yakville Housewife Meets Xantippe)

Y.H.

“Let me introduce myself, an older woman,
having been Successful lucklessly enough.
I could only be a bimbo, soccer mom, or
old maid teacher, tried them all by turns, the stuff
and very source of separation. And as I age,
every second shopgirl tries to cheat me. Dozens
of years of days of hours consumed without a trace
but for these mean and caustic ashes, doing husband’s
cooking, cleaning, shopping, weeding, washing, lying,
here I lie – buried in a standard case.
A paperback analyst saw woman’s soul as dying
after needful generation of the race,
since by her nature she can never emulate
a Tribal Chieftan, Elder Statesman, any Public
Type of the Mature, Accomplished Figure. Great
with pregnant dreams, I find I stand like those stilted arctic
villages, that last by keeping the chill that upholds them.
Surely, I must share the patron saint of both
the scholar and the shoolboy, pedantry and doldrums;
be good all year, pretend belief, and get the gold.
How I wish I were the Truthflower, turning dead
and white if harvested for any domestic table,
lost its heavenly blue. It won’t let us pretend
and savor its downfall.”

XAN: “Up from the noisome fog of my fable,
I was there in the broad hall with your high school suitor
in the days when the steady boyfriend collared his girl
by the back of the nape between his thumb and forefinger, herding
her along, her face in shadow – for you all
looked down. What was the dark thought behind that down-
cast face? Perhaps the alien growing in you, taking
parts against its mind, suspected with a frown
that life is not a play nor goodness skill at acting.
Don’t you recall those perfect-seeming English ladies,
cycling out thrice daily for an egg, a bun,
a cutlet, irreproachable in tweeds or maybe
summer shirtwaist, de rigueur the corset, dun-
toned Oxfords (two-inch heels), the proper stockings, hat –
such visions of sturdy, upright posture, poised to backpedal,
acting much to their advantage, yet they had
less freedom moving through their world than these worm gatherers
with their flags and girlie stickers, not to mention

unwashed cowboy way out West with super hat
and duper buckle making us think of him as handsome.
Hat or flag's low dues to pay. But a caveat –
better be a partial mismatch with your world
than render everything you make of self to Caesar.
To navigate at all in climes of time, to hold
some course through currents of belief and social weather,
is to run counter to the tidal step and gesture.
Dancing on the offbeat won't win Belle of the Ball,
but homage to convention can't make you successful;
it can only make you more conventional.”

Y.H.: “You mean – if you cannot join them, lick them? Are you mad?
The dying Rosalind Franklin's Nobel Prize was handed
to a callow boy who judged her not so bad
if only she'd worn lipstick. Rachel Carson's passion
for the planet was impossible to pundits,
since her only children were adopted. Do
you really think that lipstick or gestation undoes
gales of clever, willful malice? Is the truth
that even tokens are beside the point although
expedient on some occasions? But our hushing,
full defeat is easy for the wicked, so
inclined, or just indifferent. And all our rushing
to and fro has no effect upon the pendulum
in the passage, slicing off even pieces of life.”

XAN.: “What ought to count is how you get there in the interim.
Daphne sacrificed her form to own her life;
Apollo could catch and keep and own her only as
a laurel crown. So they could have what they most wanted,
not their way of wanting it. Suppose he had
a future as a poet, and she, the huntress hunted,
would have made a wretched mistress. Voluntary
acts, by choice or not, make character, are what
we become; the bashful, courteous murderer was very
much a killer; the respected wife-beater was
a brute; to build the ramp to Massada was the act
of a slave, however to be pitied. All your truly
well intended works unite the matter and
the essence, soul and substance, in one single body,
making you whole as if incarnate in a world
of shades upholding brazen masks. But what the next Dark
Age will make of you I cannot say. antio ”