

## *The Service Road*

### *in four specious stanzas*

There stood the mother grieving, beside the cross weeping, while on it hung her beloved son.

Translation of the first line of *Stabat Mater Dolorosa*, a mystical poem likely written by  
Jacopone Da Todi or Pope Innocent III (1230-1306)

#### I. Colour means

I spread the apricot jam all over my body and into my hair. Why carry a gun, I asked myself? The colour of an apricot in one country is different from the colour of an apricot in another. If I shoot, only I will know.

I was already dressed to the nines, stunning in a pink jacket and a neck wrap. I wandered to the back yard and leaned against the pinkish brick wall that was, in fact, yellow. Children often confuse the colours of pink and yellow which may mean there is enormous visionary strength in the rather large picture of this yard on the Service Road. It may also be the nuances that replace yellow with pink, replace apricot with watermelon.

Nobody else was there.

#### II. Colour still means if sound tries to take over

The whiz of traffic on the Queen Elizabeth Way was there. Yes, traffic moves, but the whiz itself is almost static. Constant like a whir, a whir mocking the creek that limped along in front of me, damaged and slow. We already know we are a British colony, mind you; that's why the whir is named after a British queen. She had her qualities. She drank dry gin martinis--one of those special qualities, four cocktails a day, they say. The Queen Elizabeth whir.

That yellow brick house was on a Service Road. What is a service road? Who does it serve? I was thinking that it didn't serve me, a common self-interested trope, I realize.

I was wearing a pink and grey checked knee length coat and a pink bonnet that tied under the chin. I have pinkish skin: I am white. My mother is white and speaks a sloppy sounding language, but my ears are young and don't yet know about gorgeous nuance or a warm voice. My father is almost white and speaks a language that is forceful and untouched. Dancing is better than speaking sometimes. Speaking in tongues is not my forte, but dancing may well be.

I decided: I may as well wait for my mother to return to me in that yard. Then I decided to weep: why would she leave me here, I asked? I don't even remember where my father was or if he was absent. Maybe he was present. His presence was attractive. I wondered: when had he left the house in the smooth grey-blue Jaguar that I have tried to find ever since my birth? All that mattered was that my mother was going to work, she was taking steps to resolve things, to make things better. I am pretty sure

she did not take the revolver in the car because it was illegal to carry firearms in an automobile on the Queen Elizabeth Wharf in Toronto. Canada was a colony: underlings could not figure out how to blame the queen.

I thought: what is the point of blame?

Then I thought: my mom and I, we just want to have fun.

### III. A slippery turn that will hurt your feelings

I was older than one, but younger than two when I wore that coat. The tiny coat had a royal blue velvet collar as if it had been designed for a 1952 Easter mass. A blue velvet collar to soften the blow of Jesus' death in a sloppy migrant version of a gorgeous Slavic language, or maybe to crown the resurrection of Jesus' body. The only body I knew was pinned to a cross on a hill, but I could not attest it was the winding hill in High Park. I felt badly that everyone was looking at him, Jesus, because he was almost naked. But then I thought: the images we have been forced to see cannot hide his sensuous slender chest and long brown hair, or the five wounds. The grievous fifth wound is not in my vision, but I know it is salient, or maybe seminal. This torture is unimaginable, and yet, it is our inheritance as we temper our loves of war. I realize I am speaking backwards. No more jokes, I say. But the adjective that indicates our possession is also back-leaning.

How could a little girl know about this Jesus and his torture and eventual murder if I didn't go backwards?

I guess I am questioning your expectations for which I cannot bear to apologize.

The main point being I want my mother to come home and I want her to play with me, on the floor, hug me and call me her angel, her angel again and again. On a good day, she counts money for men who are usually taller than her and always less handsome, less well-dressed. She can type letters, diacritical marks and numbers faster than I can run down the stairs. Which to be honest, is not that fast.

I have evidence. My mother was awarded the Intermediate Certificate at Mimico High School in grade 10, when she graduated on July 6, 1943. Her teacher was Miss Tourgis. Mind you, it was only the Commercial program. The government and the schools had other interests in female labour. They were keen to train my mother and her female cohort to replace men in gun work and cope with other creases, other hopes. If women can make guns, they can make joy.

The program we call "education" was also designed to push capable young women typists or stenographers into the munitions factory on Lakeshore Road while Canadian men gunned down the enemy with a spurious Canadian item on Lakeshore Road.

Example: the failed Sten MK. II, a sub machine gun that my mother and the girls built from 1942 until as late as 1958, was an inadequate killing device. Women were key in the war effort in a backward way.

The question is: did they kill?

#### IV. Slippery Dvorák in disguise

Helena typed 93 words per minute on a manual typewriter when she was 16 years old—for Miss Tourgis. She loved Miss Tourgis. I must assume she learned on the Dvorák keyboard layout for English words. I only remember this keyboard because of the name, Dvorák. It is a weird backwards thing but this time, it is true. Helena had a thing for Dvorák. The Dvorák who performed *Stabat Mater Dolorosa* in 1883 in London, three years after the performance in Prague. The *Stabat Mater* that was performed in Budapest before it went to London. The mother stood by the cross, she wept: why have you forsaken me?, she may have asked. Our Lady of Sorrows has lost her child, so why do I weep in the back yard? My mother could hear the sad hymn as she wept for my happiness.

There is a conclusion that is slippery, unmounted, red.

I miss my mother. If you tell me you do not miss your mother, you have studied how to disguise the clear and undeniable truth.

February 22 to October 11, 2024  
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