

Cleo Griffith

Aftermath

Since then, nothing has coincided
with my calendar
little things remain misplaced
I do not see what I used to see
through windows
sky layers the earth
ten feet deep
sun and moon slip together
over the sudden canyon
where the dark is not lit
by their radiance
even though I see the rays
like shafts of silver
across the tops of trees
along the canyon walls
red canyon walls
but darker
where no days go by
yet there is an unknown date
on the newspaper
that I hold
to the dark window
seeking light.

Examine All

Examine all my checkbooks, receipts,
you shall not find my secrets.
My purchases, though colorful,
sometimes whimsical,
shall not reveal
my out of body trips to islands in the sky, no,
nor can you find in stacked photographs
my lists of sins,
those unwanted memories are buried deep
in clouds where I dug hard
and never returned.
No books I've read will define me,
though some have echoed my steps,
nor will the music of youth or age
elucidate, you are meant to wonder,
you are meant even to worry.
From now on you must find your way
without guidance from one who has made
all your mistakes and more.

Let's go to Plan B.

This crazy century so far is giving me a headache,
let's reverse, go back to 1999 and do a re-do
we should have been to Mars by now
and roped in stray meteors to study,
the ocean's bottom layers should be open books
to all our scientific access, illness should be erased
what happened to the progress of the 20th
as we shifted into the 21st, I never felt the brakes,
no crash revealed a sudden stop.
I am concerned, by now I expected paradise on earth
or least release from hunger for all man,
some small accomplishments like that to show we've been active,
but all seems now about communication
and most of that is minor stuff,
not important to our history, our future, existence,
just periodic fluff and lightweight people doing
silly things to make themselves be known
and make themselves be rich,
what happened to the need for examples that need to be set,
where are the huge acts of sacrifice that endure
and conquer greed among the marketers,
how do we stabilize our sanity in this word of constant chatter,
so many words about things that matter less than little --
that was me yesterday--
and I am worried now that youth has not bettered itself
over these 80 years, have you learned nothing from me
am I nothing but a scrap along the road where you pass
in your expensive shoes and your tablet phones
have you nothing else on which to spend your time
than this search for pleasure, it is mind-boggling to watch
all these generations following me and doing the same
useless things with no thought for humanity,
being too involved with today's special sport or game.
No advance directive to teach the needs for adulthood,
no guidebook lying on the table in the living room
with maps, directions, how to turn the corner into
humankind from childhood, so much needed, so little there.

Pale Voice of the Tigress

It was her pale voice which stayed
hovered in the room after the last breath
almost touchable a coolness
from she who had been a tigress,
fierce with dark determination
face to face with her own limitations
until she melted under the heat
of resistance against what might have been.

Nothing about her had been pale or quiet
she had been a poignant protester against
mediocrity, her own flounderings
should have been lessons
for those followed footsteps, her shoes
slapped against the world's stage,
knew the chalk marks, fell into the angles
righteously, gave no credence to critics
except her own inner red voices
which had been trained by the years
to always say onward, never stop.

What else could there be
than war for a warrior, death by lance,
always preferable to demise by
soul's starvation, hands taught to cling
lips to smile legs to hold her steady
on the rocks beyond the shoreline.
She swam like a mermaid, flew like a dolphin
above the waves into the torrent of years
became a gull, but never could rise high enough,
higher than the strange blue mountains
which rose like borders to a nightmare,
sinister in pastel but full of gravity
as bad as a chain and she protested,
seeing her imprisonment as punishment
not able, like some later, to turn and see
the minor glories of the cage within which
she dwelled, the satisfactions which could be found,
the pleasure planned for others,
minor incidents along her journey
when her eyes sought that final goal
which was not this, this passing altogether
leaving only a strange unknown paleness.

Time has closed

The bland-faced clock
that never spares a tic or toc for you or me
whirls space-frenzied, never knowing
hearts or souls or cuts or bruises
nothing uses eternity as carelessly,
meteors and snails are all the same
in this enclosure, and that is surely: nothing
for come what might, from what is called nature
or what is named man, this procedure
continues, speeds up a bit if science is to be believed,
and why not, we believe many outlandish things
here on this minute planet, this mimic world,
where we actually waste our lives
contemplating
what those lives are for.
There is nothing there past the tic and toc.
Meaning is a farcical caricature of mind,
some junior puzzle to fritter away
some wayward quarters of an hour
here and there, now and then,
think of the bottom of the oceans
the millions of living creatures
who scorn time and its supposed essence: age;
the millions of things floating
in all the uncountable galaxies
what is sixty seconds what is the length
of a heartbeat, a sigh, a love...
illusion, but so solid, I cry against what
has no use for me, cry for timelessness
and time lost, stand so very alone
in what is called a time zone in this land
where earth has come and gone and we
don't know it yet.

Cleo Griffith was Chair of the Editorial Board of *Song of the San Joaquin* for twelve years, and remains on the Board. She has been published in *Cider Press Review*, *Homestead Review*, *Iodine*, *Main Street Rag*, *Miller's Pond*, *More Than Soil*, *More Than Sky: The Modesto Poets*, and others. A member of the Modesto CA Branch of National League of American Pen Women, she lives in Salida, CA with her husband Tom and their aptly-named cat, Tank.