

GRECIAN KEYS

Georgia Scott

I. Seductions

1

My mother and grandmother are singing
koo peh peh koo peh peh.
Their hands swirl like two globes

or two women in shawls
dancing the way Greeks do
close enough to know

a woman's perfume
the tilt of her head
the arc of her arms.

They sing.
They turn.

I am mesmerized.

2

Making the *kourambiedes*,
they ease the butter soft
with their hands. Like midwives
holding up their prize
shimmering and wet
they say "Look
and you will learn. Not like Americans
who need everything written down.

And I think, never my hands,
so padded and soft, bookish already.
I seek signs of their strength -
the bulge of blue vein like the sex of a man
that frightens and fascinates.

II. Visions

1

My tonsils like tired fruit, long past picking,
Weep
Bad juices.

Limbs stiffen.
Fever pitches.

The doctor's
"It should be done at once."

My mother's
"No."

My father's
Shoes in the closet.

The Bogie Man trying them on.

2

Under the clock at Filene's
this is where people meet
sisters,
aunts,
friends,
and cousins.

Why not a father?

From the age of five,
I have looked for the dead in crowds.

III. Riddles

1

I remember the house filling with strangers,
chairs and tables sprung up like mushrooms everywhere.

A man is on the toilet, trousers about his ankles.
I don't know who he is.

Taking out the napkins, I ask "Is it a party?"
No one answers. I raise up my arms.
In my first black dress, I dance by myself.

2

My mother, grandmother, and I -

Three heads of black hair and eyes.

Three shapes in black dresses.
Three ashen faces.

One with no front teeth saying "cheese."

IV. Customs

1

Widow or not,
she belonged in the street,
shaking her maracas

with someone not me
dancing atop a bed into the New Year.

2

My mother in black, as is our custom,
years past her mourning, runs,
teenaged on the porch steps,
sandals slipping from her heels
and snatches a shawl from the kitchen chair
leaving cards with untold fortunes
and unfinished solitaire.

She runs to meet the neighbor in the darkness,
never seeing me

a child in the lilacs bordering both yards.

3

Afterwards she said
"I don't know where you get your ideas."

Then, "Have you eaten?"
"How long till *Dynasty*?"

With the dying, talk is practical.
I ask about Heaven. Who she hopes to see.

"Always your first one."
She hands back my poems with a wink.

V. Beasts

1

The dog knew,
sure as he'd been told.
The room smelled of it.

He lay down very still
at the door. Sentry to our footsteps,
guarding the sickbed like a bowl

of food past decomposing
though once good, he gnawed
a sock that would go missing
trenched deep between his paws.

2

Mice had been our family joke
coming out for company
and expiring on the couch
poison drunk, feet and bellies up.

But when the young ones grew
wise or plain immune
they stayed away and got fat
and wouldn't return whatever we did.

So we bought ourselves some traps
set the springs and went to bed.

And woke to the squeals
of stomachs snared and guts revealed
eating our own for breakfast.

VI. Temptations

1

Alone with her, I couldn't resist.

What in life was so inviting
was no less in death.

I kissed the length of her legs

while they stretched
as if on the promenade already

someone ahead of me was waving.

2

Feeling the cushion gone
from her breasts, I turned

to her still spirited curls,
their deep night and endless perfume,

until I felt myself lifted free.

Like someone drowning who doesn't succeed, I wept
when I was returned to the living.

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