Rene's Husband; The Shawl

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Renee’s Husband

I’d like to introduce you to my wife  
Who’s in the powder room. Her name’s Renee.  
She’s beautiful but needs to live in strife  
—Only with me, a charitable man.  
Doctor, would you please snitch a canapé  
For me, by reaching over if you can?

Why should I suffer? When I was a child  
My mother would always battle  
Not with my father, not with my brother—me,  
Though I never acted wild.  
She’d spank me when I’d shake my rattle.  
As later she’d shake me violently.

But I want to get back to my wife.  
Doctor, as you’ll see when you see her mood  
Swings, swinging from bad to good,  
She gives me no calm in my life  
Which I need with a mother like that.  
Do we choose our mates from the past,  
Looking for love that can’t last?  
She’s like an acrobat

Not in bed, but with emotions.  
I want her on medication  
—True Women’s Liberation  
From all her crazy notions
Of how I'm black and white, of how I, I
Deprive her, showering her with gifts.
She yells it is for me I give her little lifts,
And why don't I let her die?

* * *

Renee, come meet this fine psychiatrist.
I didn't catch your name at first.
Put that drink down. I insist.
Have a Coke if you're "dying of thirst!"
These canapés are great. Aren't they, Doc?
Not gin, tonic. Tell her it's no good,
On top of these ups for her mood,
To drink, that they'll put her into shock.
What she buys from these dealers is schlock!
It's better she mix food:
Liverwurst, frankfurters. Would
You bite them like you bite my cock!
What do you mean? He's used
To hearing words like this!
Tell him how you bite when we kiss,
When you're getting, like now, juiced.

* * *

Please Doc, don't wander off.
I know you don't like talking,
You guys—silent types who cough
Ahem, ahem. Don't start walking
Away from me, or else I'll give you you know what.
Don't stare like her who's cool,
Especially when I'm hot.
Don't treat me like an infantile fool
Who, when he's rattled, will shake.
I'm not the kind of man
Who'd rather bend than break
But will do everything he can.
Why am I talking like this
When I'm asking for your assistance
To help my wife, not piss
You off with what she calls my butcher's persistence?
So here I've introduced you to my wife
Who's eating like she should to keep her health.
We'd like a consultation. Please, your card.
The fee's no matter. I'm a man of wealth
Who'll pay what's necessary till this strife
Between us ends. You'll be our bodyguard
Because one day I'll go, I'm scared,
Out of control, if she keeps acting mad
At me, at what's inside her, at the wall
She sometimes bangs—it's true—when we're embattled,
When I act cool, when I refuse to suffer all
Her manipulations, when I refuse to get rattled.

* * *

Put that drink down. Where are you going?
A mood swinging her to that good-looking man.
Dance with him, bitch. Stand up if you can.
Do you see, Doc, how she's showing
You, spitefully, how nuts she can be
Deserting me like this,
Giving that stranger a kiss!
Look at what she does to me!
The Shawl

Me reweath, Marye, thy sone and thee.

"Sunset in Calvary"

I'm not a pretty woman, never was.
My nose is surgically small, my eyes slitty.
My hair, even when combed, looks electrified.
My legs, poor things, are like a pelican's.
But men have always liked my being witty,
Especially my soldier—he was young,
Talkative, generous, blond, blue-eyed.
His eyes were cowish, a shade of dung!
I overstepped myself again—no tact.
This room is sheltered, quiet, don't you think?
A bed that cranks up like an ack-ack gun,
A vase of exploding roses.
Shutup shutup shutup shutup shutup.
Are you a male nurse, social worker, shrink?
—Angellic in white, a beard like Moses.
A pelican's some symbol for a Jew.
And the good doctors of Jerusalem
Cut the cord from his neck, turning him pink.
What is that gurgling, bubbling in the sink?
Nothing. Petals folding like two hands in prayer.
My soldier was 19. I am 31.
Homesick New Yorkers making Aliyah.
We made love for a night, one night, that's all.
Enough to start the deadly birth—the Fall
Of Isaac was his name—appropriate?
Ten pounds of scrunchy fat and smiles,
And talkative? He wouldn't shutup.
Some nights I told him I'd mute him—he'd smile.
Some nights I told him I'd give him away,
He was driving me crazy—no sleep—he'd smile.
I loved him shutup I loved him shutup.
Baby, I'd say, I've got a goyisha kup
With fantasies, shmantasies driving me wild.
I'd sing to him, Go to sleep, drop dead, my child.
Cut to a kibbutz, rest cure, no street
Noises, no cars, cabs, buses, trucks.
Smash a champagne bottle against the sky—
Stars! Carve a piece of feta cheese—moon!
And blessed exhaustion after a mute day's work.
And how I loved to see him in the mornings
Kick at his mobile, blue-eyed. Were his father's dung?
Oh he was handsome, what's-his-name, and young.
Alarms, alarms, snatch babies out of their cribs,
Running across courtyard, down to the shelter.
Shutup shutup shutup shutup
The terrorists are really coming,
Triggers of Kalishnikovs they're strumming,
And I am rocking him to sleep and humming.
But shutup shutup Sha! they'll kill us all
Unless you quiet him! I take my shawl
And wrap it like a shroud around his face.
His eyes are frantic—shh—a second more.
I hear them, don't you, running past the door?
Why doesn't he answer me—Yitzhak?
Isaac? Shmendrik? Aren't I witty?
They never told me I'd be pretty.
But I've become a tragic heroine.
I'm praised and mourned in all of the cafes.
Are you an angel glowing there in white,
Or am I doped by all these pills I've taken?
Green ones, yellow ones, purple ones, pink.
I know I should get up and vomit in the sink
Or stand inside a shower leaking gas.
I'll lie beside my baby and the grass
Will cover us brown as dung, and when the birds
Try to waken us for the Apocalypse
We'll whisper to them, both in baby-talk
Shutup shutup shutup shutup.