Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Karen Paul Holmes: Two Poems

Karen Paul Holmes · Thursday, February 2nd, 2023

They Say We Are Not the Body

And they're probably right, but when I broke through the railing, then fell eight feet off the deck, it sure felt like my body. The snap of humerus. The bruises coloring my right hip like a world map.

The heart injured from falling out of marriage is not an out-of-order heart. It still beats the slow meter of grief or anger's adrenalin drum.

Once I heard a guru discuss out-of-body episodes.
Floating, he didn't even want to be that boring thing below.
He told of those under anesthesia who'd watched their own surgeries, then recounted details only a doctor would know.

And what about the body asleep in Mother's hospice bed?

I sensed she was already in the green room, stepping into a turquoise dress, fluffing her hair, blotting her new lipstick, Fire Engine Red.

Macedonian Wedding, Flint, Michigan

I wanted to marry a Macedonian

he told them, Go to college first.

but the guys *right-off-the-boat*—deodorant illiterate, greased hair, pointy black shoes—grossed out my sisters and me.

At our church *vecherinkas*, they lined up at the long bar, staring over their whiskeys making hissing/mating noises as our backs danced by—part of the line snaking around the room.

We knew they were dying to pinch our behinds.

When these young men approached Dad about us,

At 25, I met a guy with an MBA who could pass as one of us—olive skin, wavy black hair, a taste for *piroshky*, *baklava*, and our music.

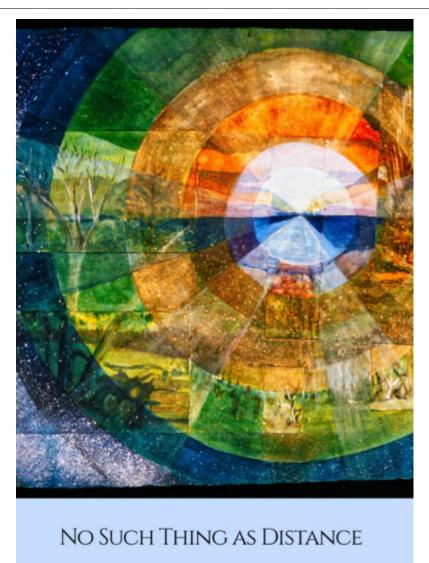
We set the date for when
Boris & The Blue Tones could come from Toronto, then married in front of the painted iconostasis at St. Nicholas. A satin *platno* draping our shoulders *to bind us*, we circled the altar three times wearing crowns: *first steps as sovereigns of our own household*.

The church women had baked the *koluk*, a sweet, two-foot round bread, blessed by Father Raphael. *Nunka*, my Godmother, held the good luck loaf over each guest as we all danced the *ora*, me leading, dressed in virginal white, whirling Auntie Vera's lace hanky.

Two hundred holding hands circled the hall that doubled as a basketball court.

Step step step to the right, kick kick. A walking pace, then growing more and more furious, the footwork fancy. The drunker the older men, the lower they squatted, thrusting feet, jumping, spinning—red-faced dervishes (aortas about to burst), the band urging, surging to a tornado pace.

My sister had made a silk drawstring bag to collect cash tucked into my hand as guests kissed us goodbye. Lucky for me, no one demanded bed sheets next day for proof of my purity. But this was Flint, and it was, after all, 1979.



KAREN PAUL HOLMES

No Such Thing as Distance by Karen Paul Holmes

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