

## Renee Rodin / THREE POEMS

### FOR LUCK

I pat the shell of the blue/green carved turtle  
though according to Marie, my father's friend  
who learned to read cups from her mother in Egypt  
the turtle signifies the enemy  
because it hides  
she was dismayed to find its feathery form  
in the dregs of my espresso  
I've always relied on the hidden being benign

I've knocked on wood  
saved spiders from drowning in tubs  
lit sage to dispel lingering ill-will  
picked only multiples of fives  
even if Grandma Sneakers told me in numerology  
my affinity is with six

the lion is my sun sign      the elephant my champion  
from the time in London  
I was young, very pregnant and braced with prejudice  
as an old Gypsy approached me in Petticoat Lane  
wary she'd gyp (as in Gypsy) rip me off  
she took my hand and pressed into it  
a tiny white elephant  
"for luck" she whispered and disappeared

I lost it in the hospital  
but came home with a beautiful baby

since, I'm aware of the special powers of elephants  
they've been given to me on other occasions  
I've chosen some on my own  
all different kinds  
all with a certain quality I can't describe

when the kids were bigger  
on a rare evening I splurged to step out  
the sitter couldn't be there  
instead she sent her mother, who waited in the kitchen  
while I ran to each child cajoling them into bed  
anxious she could hear my pleadings, hisses, commands  
"please lie down, go to sleep  
go to sleep, lie down, please"  
as they did their three-ring circus routine

at last they were settled, I was ready to leave  
the woman said "don't get insulted"  
oh, oh my insides clenched  
here's the critique on my inept parenting techniques  
"your elephants are wrong" she pointed  
"your luck is going out the door"

I removed them from the sill, never near a window or a door  
and brought some in, for luck, to my bookstore  
where they caused great consternation  
people in flaps, advising and admonishing me  
"turn your elephants around"  
"head on to protect you"  
"on an angle"  
"beside a dish of water"

now they are in the position I favour  
from a young man who was taught by his father in Syria  
have them face the door  
let them always see the way that is out  
so they know they are with you by choice, for luck

and from my mother and hers from Russia  
whenever you make a new home  
first bring in a bit of bread and some salt  
this means you'll have everything you need  
the sustenance and spice of life will be yours  
it works  
for luck

## READERS AND COMPANY

Eudora Welty as a child believed books grew in gardens  
so they do  
no matter what the terrain planted they grow  
producing weird, wonderful fruits and flowers  
you name it especially if you don't  
they grow everywhere

a legacy from my mother  
the image of her lying on her bed reading  
content for brief periods with existence  
her mother too, voracious  
the family joked she'd read anything  
and watched her glued to "Midnight"  
the Montreal ultra-trash (en anglais)  
they set before her 90 year old eyes

early on the treasure was my library card  
my ticket away  
I devoured several books a week  
mostly biographies of famous women  
but Freud might have been right when he said  
"the mechanism of poetry is the same as that  
of hysterical phantasies"  
the first big crush I had was on Chester  
who sat beside me in grade two  
because he wrote me a poem

a while later I fell in love with another 16 year old  
who I was eventually to marry and have children with  
(reverse a bit of that order)  
when he handed me a paper napkin  
on it was a poem he said he'd written for me  
by the time I found out it was really a Dylan song  
it was too late I was already smitten  
though I should have paid closer attention to the title  
"It Ain't Me Babe"

throughout my life all my lovers (I've had a few)  
and friends (I've been blessed with many)  
have had passionate relationships  
some heckled when they were drunk  
some heckled when they were sober  
they were all intensely involved  
listened to, read, wrote poetry

my resistance to the poet not to the poem  
is stronger now  
unlike my promiscuous grandmother  
my tastes are particular  
similar to Emma Goldman who never left home without one  
in case she might get arrested  
I am seldom far from a book

without a book going I am irritated, itchy  
my mind yearning to be scratched in some unknown place  
the room is littered with them  
there's usually at least one I take into my bed  
the last to touch before I fall asleep  
the first I see when I awake

whether weak or strong-spined, thick or thin  
I am stimulated    satisfied  
lost and found  
by the source of many dreams

## FOR FLORENCE

giddily we greeted your death  
heady with freedom  
when you and Daddy used to go out  
Sandy and I would jump up and down  
on the beds over and over  
until we were sated with excitement  
I wanted you to come home already  
where were you?

ma mammoth mammal you huge pale whale  
hidden dark beneath 300 pounds of scared fat  
baby what a scared baby you were  
so brilliant and bound  
corsetted up mostly wasted  
born too soon we bore too much of the weight

you consumed in the past  
family famished infant in fantasy  
with silence we shared our secret  
each afraid to be the other  
you afraid to be your mother  
all dying to be free

finally we could talk  
about the experience of your power  
fury stoked by frustration  
raging that went for months on endless  
we were an accord of anger unravelling

the "kinder" looking to find your kinder being  
passion and politics when you felt good  
belting out songs  
laughing from the belly  
beauty full light warm

I touched you were so cold  
three kisses a blessing my three kids  
yours said Kaddish at the grave  
we washed our hands in snow  
lit a candle it burned for a week  
your safe passage attended by masses  
of coffee and company sitting Shiva with us

inconceivable to be motherless  
fill the void a void the feeling  
till months later startling periods of pain  
my waters broke slowly  
you arrived in the night  
a guest of air flowing through me  
cleansing like a cat and her kitten  
"ketzelah" sometimes you'd call me  
and "mamalah" when I was still the baby

sha baby  
sha baby  
sha