

Nina Rubinstein Alonso – Two Poems

Howland Street : The Generations

Boring hours on the bus
then trolley to Howland Street

Grandma's at the third floor window
waiting to see we're alive

pours glasses of tea with
sugar cubes and mandel brot

wide fingers push brown combs
sliding loose in her gray hair

hands that pulled Grandpa out of his
monoxide car unconscious but breathing

spiders spin new webs of fear no matter
how many times we rip them down

he sits in the kitchen turning
pages of the Sunday paper

she's listening for the next nightmare
while we're stretched on the rug reading comics.

The Festival Bar, Dante Hotel *

*70's Tangier: A hotel's 'musical show'

1. Tourists

Eyes circle cubist space
ears enwoven eyes betangled
orange lights blink off blink on
perched parrots flap

clipped green wings
strobe fractures solid shapes
boys breathe boys touch boys
no sisters in this family

okay it's a gay bar but
a math teacher from Casablanca
runs his fingers down Fernando's back
'are you girl, and she, is she real girl'

displaced facsimile dancing doll
incognito silicone sculpture
'yes, she is and no, I'm not,'
Fernando smiles and sips his wine

but I flinch when the math teacher
sniffs my shoulder like a bee
testing strange perfume
trying to decide what I am.

2. Rusti Ross from London town

Purple lips pinch honeymoon jokes
'hey can you get it up boys?'

Rusti Ross mouths raunchy cartoons
sings elbow-poke British jokes

few can translate English words
but stare quiet as folded handkerchiefs

hypnotized by that red drag wig
black fake lashes pasty-cream-cheese face

narrow shoulders shaking the beat
jiggle plastic push-up boobs

stiff knees jerk to semi-strip
sequins open to a flat shaved chest

hold that pose count one two three
click off stage on arrow heels.

3. Happy Halloween

One Halloween we're glamorous
wearing mama's red lipstick
until man shape jumps

from shadow stairs
charcoal-scars on his ghost-face
plastic claws wiggling

we run up the hill terrified
beaded necklaces jingling
two ten year old girls shrieking

escaping a monster
with candy bags in our fists
afraid to tell or we'll be blamed

slam the door home gasping safe
surprised no one asks why
we're shaking speechless

copy of a copy pretense gets by
fake your way through whatever pain
don't talk about it and please don't cry.

4. Dancing boy

Brown-eyed Indian dancing boy
round-cheeked beautiful androgyne

dimpled gliding seductive bird
clearly trained to tease and flirt

eleven maybe twelve years old
as soft as Rusti was tough leather

nymph in sparkly satin pants
sleek bare midriff tip-toe feet

rolling hips honeycomb sly
young body oiled to perfection

his pink-lipped mouth pretends to bite
when a man climbs on a chair

stretches his arms and howls like a dog
aching for that rhinestone hair.

5. Basta

'Basta' says Fernando leading the way
past black cars purring at the curb

where guards polish spotless chrome
dirham means money means dollars means cash

we've had enough Dante Hotel
that's the name couldn't make it up

enough expensive flesh festivals
gilded cauldrons of sexual fire

we run down the street to the ocean
seeking comfort in water-logged stars

silvery forces from ancient spheres
indifferent to burning bodies below.

Nina Rubinstein Alonso's work has appeared in *Ibbetson Street*, *Sumac*, *The New Yorker*, *Ploughshares*, *MomEgg*, *WomenPoems*, *Cambridge Artists Cooperative*, *U. Mass. Review*, *Bagel Bards*, *Muddy River Poetry Review*, *Constant Remembrance*, *Black Poppy Literary Review*, etc. Her stories were in *Southern Women's Review*, *Broadkill Review*, *Tears and Laughter*, etc., and her book *This Body* was published by David Godine Press. She also works on *Constellations a Journal of Poetry and Fiction*, constellations-lit.com.