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Three Poems

by Laura Solomon

The Dancer

It looks so pretty to watch, I know,
me twirling and spinning through space
for your entertainment.

How you gasp as I fly through the air.

How you applaud my immaculate plies.

I exist for your amusement.

What you don't see is this –
when I take off my shoes,
the calluses gnarled and hardened
that blossom upon my feet,
the years and years of training it took me
to get to this level.

I am humble, of course, and modest.
I do my duty without complaint.

I was raised for this – almost an acrobat,
a delicate girl, fragile, even,
if a flower, then a lily.

Perhaps I exploited my looks, just a little,
to get me where I am today.
Big deal – who didn't?

There are nasty rumours in circulation,
about blow-jobs I gave, palms I crossed with my father's silver,
in order to make it into the Royal Ballet.

False, all false,
I am as innocent as snow,
an empty chalice,
waiting to be filled with other people's desires and fears and longings.

Watch me spin, my smile like rigor mortis,
a face set in plaster, like a saint,
or an angel, only to eager to serve,
to serve *you* the audience,
who lap it up and afterwards,
I sit in the green room,
my tired feet in a bucket of ice,
silence ringing in my ears.

Freda Kahlo's Cry

Today the ghost of me attended
My own exhibition at the Tate Modern.

All those paintings on display,
The ones that I laboured over for so long.

The sickening part was the merchandise.
Coffee mugs, calendars, prints, clocks –
all with either me or one of my paintings thereupon.
Somebody's making a pretty packet –
and during my lifetime, I was as poor as a church mouse,
living hand to mouth.

At least I have achieved a form of immortality.
I hang on many walls.

Nobody ever seems to bear in mind,
the price I paid during my lifetime;
my nerves of steel –
my shattered spine.

Lord Byron Gets the Blues

They called me all sorts of names. Crippled, lame, weak - a nancy boy.

Poetry was my weapon, my revenge, my gleaming sword.

We made our mark – me and my corrective boot,
heavy footsteps through the London streets, *stomp, stomp, stomp*.

Words slammed down upon the page – *wham wham wham*. One after
another, like gun shots.

They all died away; it's me who is immortal, studied on university
courses and what not,
my words echoing down through the ages.

There were rumours, of course, there always are –
words like *homosexuality* and *incest* were bandied about they stuck
their shame onto me.

Stomp, stomp, stomp – here I come with my club foot, my heavy tread,
hammering down literature's main corridor, thumping on the walls and
the doors – *let me in*,
and they did, eventually, but by then it was too late – what I wanted was
to get out, exile.

I never asked for fame, it just found me.

Fearing the lynch mob, I hunkered down in Lake Geneva.

It wasn't paranoia – they really *were* after me;
but I, I found a safe place, and continued my writings from there.

They always hate men like me; eighty years later it was Oscar Wilde
who received the same treatment.

Eventually we inspire, not fear and hatred, but admiration – what a joke!

Thank you, O humans, for all you put me through -
the making of a genius, the modelling of a man.

Laura Solomon has a 2.1 in English Literature (Victoria University, 1997) and a Masters degree in Computer Science (University of London, 2003). Her books include *Black Light*, *Nothing Lasting*, *Alternative Medicine*, *An Imitation of Life*, *Instant Messages*, *The Theory of Networks*, *Operating Systems*, *Hilary and David*, *In Vitro*, and *The Shingle Bar Taniwha and Other Stories*. She has won prizes in Bridport, Edwin Morgan, Ware Poets, Willesden Herald, Mere Literary Festival, and Essex Poetry Festival competitions. She was short-listed for the 2009 Virginia Prize and won the 2009 Proverse Prize. She has had work accepted in the Edinburgh Review and Wasafiri (UK), Takahe and Landfall (NZ). She has judged the *Sentinel Quarterly* Short Story Competition.

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