

PATRICIA ALFORD

Mrs. God

Mrs. God Takes the Hastings Express

I

Mrs. God misses the old days,
the halls of heaven are quiet now,
the eagle's nest is empty,
weeds spring up between the golden cobblestones.
Actually, that's sort of a relief, thinks Mrs. God,
after all that unremitting glory.
The cherubim have taken up yoga.
Coyote doesn't come around anymore.

Aeon by aeon God sits on his throne.
He has forgotten his youth, his jealousy,
no longer punishing the sons
to the third and fourth generation
for the iniquity of the fathers.
He loses track. Maybe
she should get the cherubim
to put the whole system on computer.
Make it automatic. God would like that.

The raven, too, droops in his cage.

II

Every day Mrs. God takes the Hastings Express.
One day she notices that all the other passengers
on the bus seem vacant, as if they have

forgotten their faces at home.
 Except that young woman just getting on
 and wearing a green velvet hat.
 The young woman reminds Mrs. God of someone.
 Mrs. God, herself, had a green velvet hat
 just like that, a millennium or two ago
 when Kootenay Loop was little more
 than a cheerless spot in a dripping rain forest.
 Come to that, thinks Mrs. God,
 it hasn't changed much.

Mrs. God hopes the young woman will look her way,
 recognise her.
 Mrs. God is prepared to smile at her if she does.

Yet, when she turns her head,
 all the young woman in the green velvet hat notices
 is that the passengers on the bus that day,
 riding non-stop up Hastings Street,
 past the OK Hairdressers and the S&M Cafe,
 have forgotten their faces at home.

III

Mrs. God cleans the stairway to heaven
 on her hands and knees
 with a scrub brush and pail.
 Disgusted at the disarray in the heavens,
 she sorts the stars according to size and distance.
 Some, she notices, have burned out long ago.

Tomorrow night,
 look up and see the stars,
 their accustomed tangle
 now orderly rows across the sky.
 Zodiac schmodiac, mutters Mrs. G,
 as she sweeps the satellites
 into her celestial dustpan,
 and tosses them into the empty cosmos next door.

IV

Mrs. God attends a high school band concert.
 She sighs and shakes her head,
 remembering them all as sleeping babies.
 She watches them
 until she sees invisible wings
 sprout from their shoulders.
 The heavenly choir is not so sweet
 as this row of high school girls.
 Of course, thinks Mrs. God,
 people have misconceptions
 about the heavenly choir.
 Oh, they can sing all right,
 but don't count on them
 for the time of day.

The trumpet player, wings unfurling,
 hits a high sweet note.
 Mrs. God thinks of Gabriel
 practising millennium in and millennium out
 to sound the last trumpet call.
 Waste of time, thinks Mrs. God.
 And Gabriel has so much time.
 Still, he'd spend it better
 whispering into the ear of this boy.
 Mrs. God nods her head
 and taps her foot.

On Monday, Mrs. God, out shopping,
 hears lively music
 coming from the direction of the sky-train station.
 The boys playing music there
 see a plump woman in a flowered dress stop to listen.
 Her feet are tired, bags heavy.
 Most people, the boys notice,
 like the idea of music on the street,
 but they don't even slow down,
 are late already.

VI

Mrs. God, too old to have babies,
makes red clay pots in her own image.

In the mirror one day, Mrs. God notices
that her hair has become the colour of rain.

Mrs. God shakes her rain-coloured head.
The sky cracks like a flower pot.

Trees, like white umbrellas, blow inside out.
Bridges wash away, the power goes out.

The Squamish highway washes into Howe Sound.
The ravens and marmots take back Whistler.

The members of the Lil'wat peoples' movement
go back to what they were doing before.

Mrs. God has a friend there, the last woman
to weave baskets from strips of birch.

VII

Mrs. God offers Eve a Fig Newton.
Here, she says,
and passes the plate of cookies to her guest,
Have a Fig Newton, Eve.
I make them myself.

Nobody makes their own Fig Newtons, replies Eve
knowingly
and takes one and dips it in her tea.
Mmmm! These are delicious.

Have another, urges Mrs. G.
I get the figs off my own tree.

What? chokes Eve,
Off of the tree?

No, soothes Mrs. God, patting Eve's back,
but I took cuttings.

All Things Unfolding into One

A hard frost, late October.
 Mrs. God in the garden
 pulls up corn stalks
 The hair roots of corn reach
 ten feet below the surface.
 With a mighty tug
 that almost throws her
 off her gum boots
 she wrenches the upper root ball
 from the deep root hairs,
 bangs the root ball on the ground
 to shake off the soil,
 snaps the brittle stem in half
 and carries armload after armload
 to the compost box,
 which is already full.
 On top of this she piles
 sunflowers grown nine feet high
 seeds already pillaged by the jay,
 squash vines, hollow and minutely spiked
 cosmos, volunteered from seed
 an inch across at the stem-base now
 and seven feet tall.
 A few, where the frost has not reached,
 still in bloom.

Mrs. God considers the wonder of the compost box
 At the surface, a higgledy piggledy
 jumble of particulars
 but at the bottom, it is a mystery,
 all things becoming one.

God, working near by,
 tinkering with the roto-tiller,
 watches his wife clear the garden.
 She'll leave the broccoli stalks
 and Brussels sprouts for the deer.
 He'll have to work around them.
 Bouncing along the furrows behind the tiller
 God considers the mystery of the seed,
 the one unfolding into all things.

The Second Coming

Mrs. God prunes the roses.
 She cuts the tea roses back to the next stem
 where new buds will appear,
 and pinches back the floribunda
 and the simple five-petaled rugosa,
 flower of Venus, and sacred to Mary.
 Fallen pastel petals sprinkle the grass
 as if a wedding party has just passed this way.

Looking up from her work, Mrs. God
 sees a reluctant figure circling in the distance,
 head bowed and feet shuffling.
 It could only be Wade,
 God's second son. That boy.
 Lazy. A heart-scald. Phones Mary,
 says he's coming, then doesn't show up.
 Prophets hate him; he makes them look like fools.
 The faded oracles over at the rest home laugh at him.
 Wade awhile, they wink and chuckle
 when they see him shamble by.
 There goes the Wade, the truth, and the life.

Mrs. God knows where he's been.
 Over at Lilith's, slumped on the couch
 in his Popeye sweat pants,
 watching *As The World Turns*
 drinking Coors from a can, smoking doobies—
 the life of the party.

Jesus was a hard act to follow.
 Wade won't even try.
 He'd rather own a dog, a black lab,
 he'd rather own a garage,
 he'd rather buy a V.W. van and drive to Jamaica,
 he'd rather think that redemption
 did not necessitate the sacrifice of the sons.

God is over at the Centre
 playing checkers with Zeus.
 Mrs. God looks up from her pruning as Wade slouches by. Yes
 She doesn't say a word to him.

End of the world, not her idea, not her way.
 Apocalypse, aschmocalypse, mutters Mrs. G
 as she deadheads the roses
 to allow for more bloom.

Mrs. God's Call to Prayer

In the morning she prays
 that the babies will sleep in
 that the goat will not put her foot in the pail
 and the cream will clabber and the bread rise

At noon she prays
 that her feet not swell
 that the yarn not tangle
 that the goat stay out of the garden
 and the dog out of the hen house

At mid-afternoon
 a quiet prayer
 shhh the baby is sleeping again

Her prayer is no more
than the lazuli bunting atop that young cedar.

At sunset she prays
for a glass of wine
a space to breathe
for the dust to settle
and the cool stars to appear

The evening prayer is not the same
as before stretches the long night.
Her work is done, but not finished
Tomorrow it will still be there,
but for now it is hidden by the shadows
cast by a single candle.
The minaret is a candle, nothing more,
but by its light she can see
the whole world sleeping.

Prayer is done with the hands
only now does she put them palm to palm.

Sin Suit

We'll give them skin, God said, no fur or scales,
no feathers. Too thin to keep them warm or dry
and easy to cut, bruise, chafe, burn or tear
one colour all over so they can't hide.

The intelligent designers did as they were told,
but one of them spoke up at a meeting
where someone should have been taking notes
someone should have been paying attention.

You realize that if they can feel pain,
they will also be able to know pleasure—
his precise words were *intense pleasure*.

But God knew nothing of pleasure, intense
or any other kind. He was all into Joy
so He didn't hear, and He let it slide.

