

NOEL KING

Husband

I will not grieve for her deity.
I will grieve for old courtship
then freshness, the giving-in,
births of our children.

I will not grieve for sallow, sullen,
suppers where food was good
but voice was stern: a bitter footed
wake of a woman pleasuring
in tantrum-riddling her closest.

I will grieve for times when
on my arm she got gracious
to others, smiled to men-folk
on race courses, her knowledge
of the nags sometimes bettering theirs,
and her style, clothes I liked her in,
designs from my success.

I will not grieve for her begrudging
my interests—the screaming
at my I'll-be-a-bit-late-home calls, the waiting,
cocooned in our smoke-filled bedroom,
to spit at whatever I'd been to.

I will grieve for our children,
losing a mother in their young adulthood
a mother they could rely on but
never predict a sharp or soft response
or which from the mood of the day.

I will not grieve for the sagging breasts,
shapeless lines of a smoking woman's
later-life body, especially when
he who sees remembers: a hard frozen
1950s Doris Day swimsuit, at a near-home resort.

I will not grieve for years when
package holidays got oftener, lavisher
then lavisher but less satisfied.

I will not grieve for the first trip without the children
when she went topless
and my shame thinking other men
were peering at my wife's tits,
taking pity on what I had.

I will grieve for moments
of close time in the bed or the kitchen perhaps,
or a quickie somewhere, where
the soft-voiced one I had fallen
in love with still enchanted somewhere in me.

I will touch her now soon,
one last time, kiss the coldness away,
shoulder my children
and the people we know
will shake our hands,
embrace,
mutter,
grieve briefly with us.

I will not grieve for her deity.