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Catherine Bell

*ARE YOU A MAN OR A MOUSE MAT?*

Are you a man or a mouse mat?

Are you talking to me?

I look over my shoulder just to check if she was referring to someone else standing behind me. But to no avail. Here, the attempt to emasculate, to challenge my designation: I, Man. But then which man: Surely not I, not me man? I never deserved this; I didn't say those things. And if she thinks I am a mouse-mat, what is this inscription she writes all over me? Did I say that? I'm starting to feel cheated. I think she's putting words in my mouth - stick in my eye. Stitching me up. I don't know how to defend myself against this tirade, this abuse: those red letters, the way they sit so proud on the surface of my culture. It's not fair. Did I actually say these things? Is this me I read before me, the portrait she constructs of me, or the voice of some other? Are these intimate confessions somehow more than what we said, to what he said?

Wait! Hang on a sec. What did she say? Where are her words here? Surely the one who clips me has something to say - did say? What did you say? When? I can't recall. I can't imagine what you may have said. Did we stand on this rug there and say these things to each other? No longer treasured words, but now seeping wound, battle-scar, blight on your skin, my words falling from you to the floor; embedded, stood on, stood over. Foot wiped; swept under. Why are you so silent? Where are your words now woman? Stifled by your tears, have I suffocated you; my imposition, my culture; my necessity? Shall I point and call you instigator, protagonist - deviant artist! Unravelling yourself like this in public. My words are now your words - your recollections. My loss. My wounding you is now your abuse and shame back to me; the lash that comes with guilt.

And who are you then, looking, drawing in closer to read, to decipher my words, the pattern of my life? I always thought that the words of my lover would comfort me, not scratch. You: fascinated by the fact that I now lay bleeding here before you all over this rug. [Why this blood?] This red of all reds? Do these thoughts obtain your voice, the words you cannot speak; the text you dare not write? Are they uncomfortable with their new position, their new opposition as you and me? Unpleasurable situation. Your frankness undermines me here. An elision between happenings and memory, between what was said, embellished by intensity and by hurt; how crowded a memory can become as you bystanders move in closer to obtain a better look, fascinated by the debris strewn all over the floor, the fallout. Don't think you're off the hook. These recollections, recordings, replaying our turbulent place; the demarcation of the rug in our living room. Our home... our space. Our words, not for them to hear; never intended for them to read. You are putting me on trial here.

What is the motif here? Reducing a marriage to quips, my ignorance of you, writing me out, scaling me down until I am small enough to contain. Inserting me into a labyrinthine cunning, pushing me into the design of an almost indecipherable field. The embodied word: barely a whisper, over there a screaming match. My Farsi tongue, your English script: never empty when lovers speak.

It's enough to make you hair fall out.

Stephen Garrett 2007