

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Karen Paul Holmes: Two Poems

Karen Paul Holmes · Thursday, February 2nd, 2023

They Say We Are Not the Body

And they're probably right, but
when I broke through the railing,
then fell eight feet off the deck,
it sure felt like my body. The snap
of humerus. The bruises coloring
my right hip like a world map.

The heart injured from falling
out of marriage
is not an out-of-order heart.
It still beats the slow meter of grief
or anger's adrenalin drum.

Once I heard a guru discuss
out-of-body episodes.
Floating, he didn't even want
to be that boring thing below.
He told of those
under anesthesia who'd watched
their own surgeries,
then recounted details only
a doctor would know.

And what about the body asleep
in Mother's hospice bed?

I sensed she was already
in the green room, stepping
into a turquoise dress,
fluffing her hair,
blotting her new lipstick,
Fire Engine Red.

*

Macedonian Wedding, Flint, Michigan

I wanted to marry a Macedonian
but the guys *right-off-the-boat*—deodorant illiterate,
greased hair, pointy black shoes—grossed out
my sisters and me.

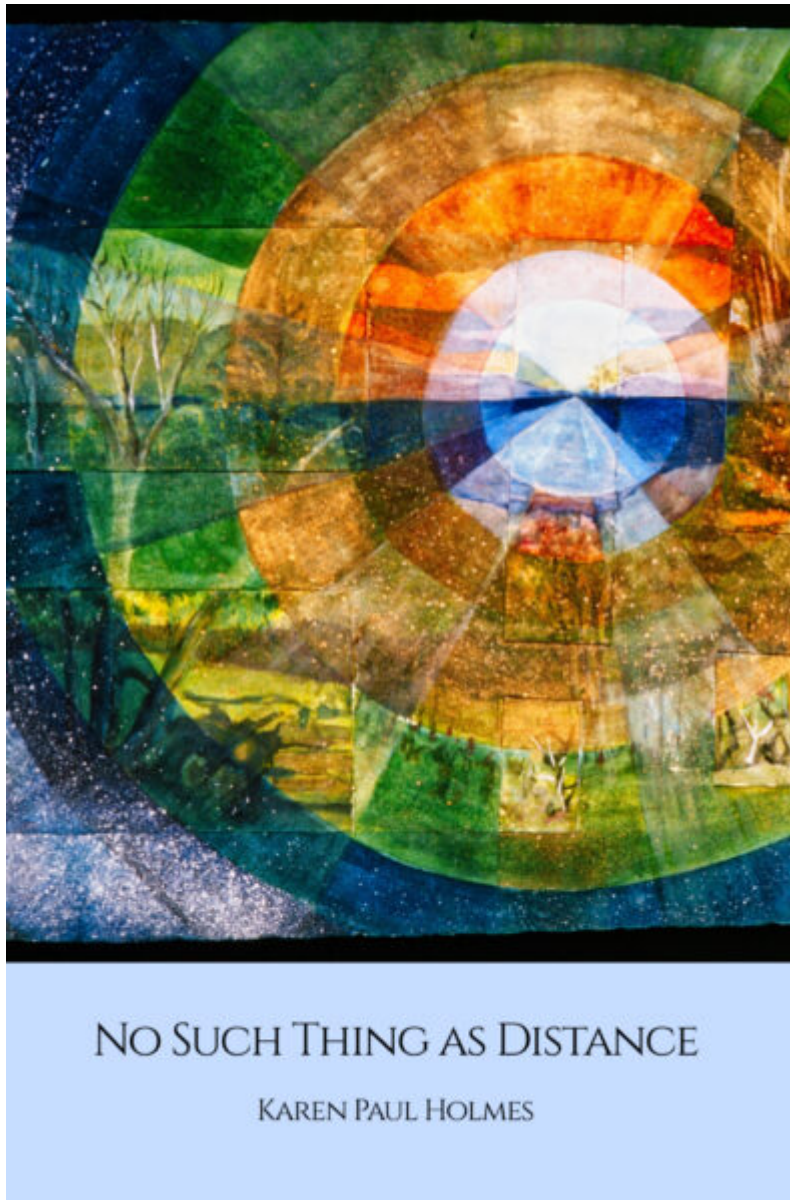
At our church *vecherinkas*, they lined up
at the long bar, staring over their whiskeys
making hissing/mating noises as our backs danced by—
part of the line snaking around the room.
We knew they were dying to pinch our behinds.
When these young men approached Dad about us,
he told them, *Go to college first*.

At 25, I met a guy with an MBA who could pass
as one of us—olive skin, wavy black hair,
a taste for *piroshky*, *baklava*, and our music.
We set the date for when
Boris & The Blue Tones could come from Toronto,
then married in front of the painted iconostasis
at St. Nicholas. A satin *platno* draping
our shoulders *to bind us*, we circled the altar three times
wearing crowns: *first steps as sovereigns of our own household*.

The church women had baked the *koluk*, a sweet,
two-foot round bread, blessed by Father Raphael.
Nunka, my Godmother, held the good luck loaf
over each guest as we all danced the *ora*, me leading,
dressed in virginal white, whirling Auntie Vera's lace hanky.

Two hundred holding hands circled the hall
that doubled as a basketball court.
Step step step to the right, kick kick. A walking pace,
then growing more and more furious, the footwork fancy.
The drunker the older men, the lower they squatted,
thrusting feet, jumping, spinning—red-faced dervishes
(aortas about to burst), the band urging,
surging to a tornado pace.

My sister had made a silk drawstring bag to collect cash
tucked into my hand as guests kissed us goodbye.
Lucky for me, no one demanded
bed sheets next day for proof of my purity.
But this was Flint, and it was, after all, 1979.



No Such Thing as Distance by Karen Paul Holmes

Purchase *No Such Thing as Distance* by Karen Paul Holmes

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