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The Columnist – the same old story

by Candida Lloyd

I had never spoken to her and yet she made vivid appearances in my dreams. Whenever I felt like a failure, there she was - a reminder of the person I ought to be. I first encountered her at our sixth form college debating society in the 1980's when she vociferously blamed Monika Lewinsky for Clinton's downfall. Surely the American president was culpable too - but I didn't have the courage to stand up and contradict her in front of our peers. This naive young woman spoke with such confidence, she had to be right.

Years later her photograph appeared above her weekly newspaper column which would declare -There's no such thing as an invisible disability! There is no glass ceiling for women in business! The removal of toilet doors in state schools is a human rights violation! This particular subject irked me because although she frequently reminded her readers of her working-class roots, I knew her children attended private schools and didn't encounter such problems.

I took perverse pleasure in hearing about her via a mutual friend who was also part of the North London media set. Apparently at dinner parties she expressed no curiosity about the other guests but would drop how she'd recently interviewed Gwyneth Paltrow at her home in Los Angeles or declare what a scream Michael Gove was in private.

She seemed to have an endless amount to say which spewed forth from every outlet: on twitter -#the train is such a civilised way to travel (to her holiday home), on her radio show - the hijab should be banned! and on television panel shows she didn't care if people laughed *at* her not *with* her? All provoked in me the same old story of disbelief, envy and a feeling that I was somehow lacking.