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PHOTOGRAPHY



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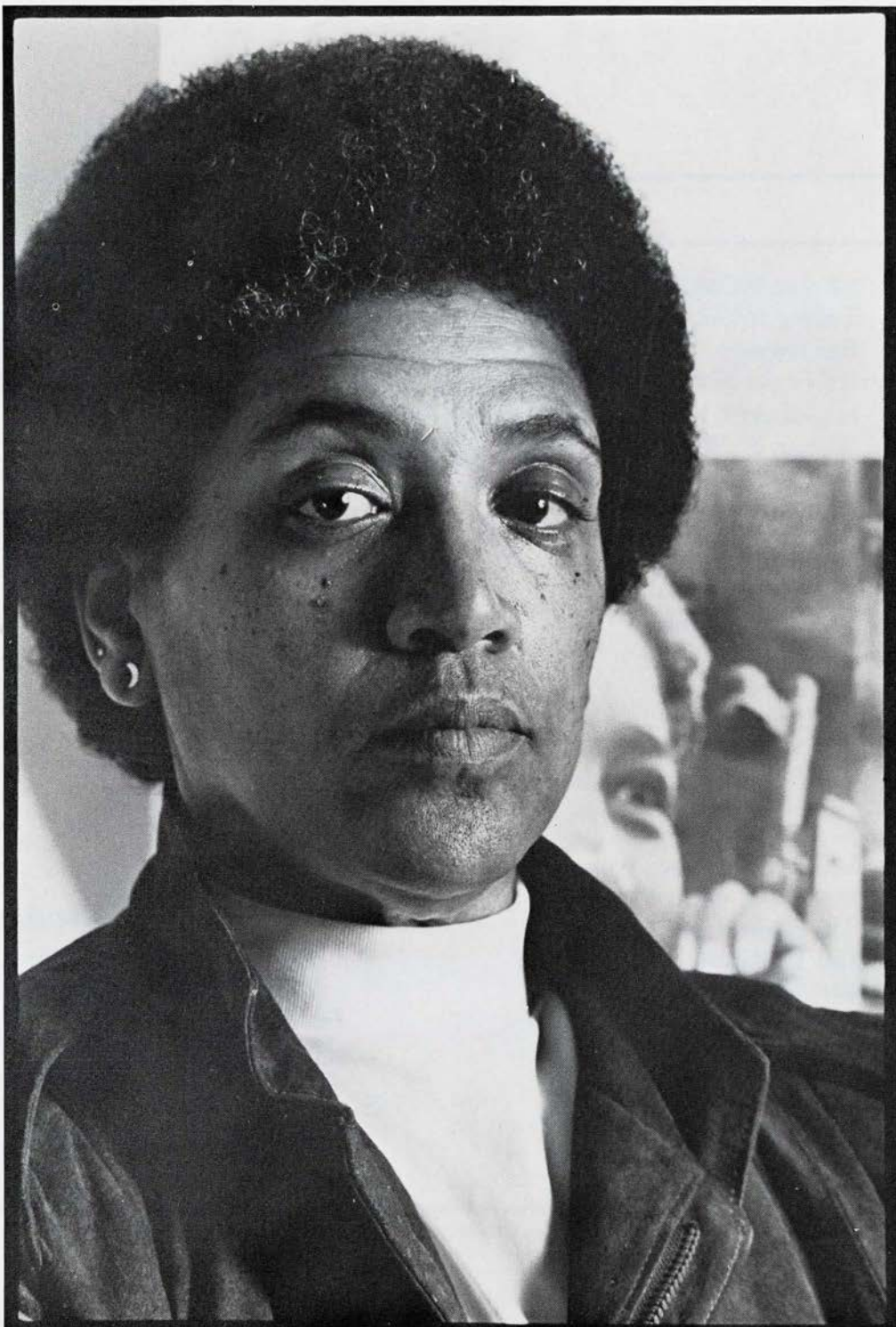
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AUDRE LORDE

THREE POEMS

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

The american deputy assistant secretary of defense
for Equal Opportunity
and safety
is a home girl.
Blindness slashes our tapestry to shreds.
The moss-green military tailoring sets off her color
beautifully
she says "when I stand up in uniform to speak
you can believe everyone takes notice!" Her mouth is dry
superimposed skull-like across her trim square shoulders
dioxin smear
the stench of napalm upon growing cabbage
the chug and thud of Corsairs in the foreground
advance like a blush across her cheeks
up the unpaved road outside Grenville, Grenada
where an M-16 bayonet gleams
slashing away the wooden latch
of a one-room slat house in Soubise
mopping up weapons search pockets of resistance
the young Black woman in a tattered headcloth
standing to one side on her left foot
is taking notice
one wrist behind her hip the other beneath her chin
watching
armed men in moss-green jumpsuits turn out her shack
watching the mashed up nutmeg trees
and fallen red cocoa-pods
the graceless broken stalks of almost ripe banana
her sister has been missing now 10 days
the baby's father buried without his legs
burned bones in piles along the road
between the shattered piping
"any Cubans around here, girl? Any guns?"

Behind her house singed tree-ferns curl
and jerk to mortar rhythms strumming up from shore
further uphill a tree explodes
showering the house with scraps of leaves
with the sweetish smell of unseen rotting flesh
a nutmeg tree takes 25 years to bloom
unless interrupted by storm or other violence.

For a while there was almost enough
water, enough rice, enough quinine for the children
nothing is left now in the house
the child tugs at her waistband
but she does not move quickly
she has heard how nervous these green men are
with their grenades and sweaty helmets
they offer cigarettes and chocolate but no bread
boxes of free batteries and herpes but no doctors
no free buses to St Georges market
no reading lessons in the brilliant afternoon
there are bodies strewn along Telescope Beach
that these soldiers say are foreigners
but she has seen the charred bits of familiar cloth
and she knows what to say to any invader
with an M-16 held ready while searching her cooking shed
overturning her empty pots with his apologetic grin
and she steps forward
the child pressing against her knees
"no guns, man, no guns. We glad you come. You carry water?"

The american deputy assistant secretary of defense
for equal opportunity and safety
a woman of color
pauses in her speech licking dry lips
"so you can see the department has a very good record
of equal opportunity for our women"
swims toward safety through a lake of her own blood.

BEAMS

In the afternoon sun
that smelled of contradiction
quick birds announcing spring's intention
and autumn about to begin
I started to tell you
what Eudora never told me
how quickly it goes
the other fork out of mind's eye
choice becoming
a stone wall across possible
beams
outlined on the shapes of winter
sunset colors of Southampton beaches
red snapper runs at Salina Cruz
where we slept in fishermen's nets.
A pendulum swings between
the rippling fingers of a belly-dancer
with her rings
and a two-year-old's sleep smell
the inexorable dwindling
nobody's choice
and for a few short summers
I too was delightful.

Whenever spring comes I wish to burn
to ride the flood like a zebra goaded
shaken with sun
to braid the hair of a girl long dead
or is it my daughter grown
and desire for what is gone
lies sealed into hunger like an abandoned mine
nights when fear came down like a jones
and I lay rigid with denials
the clarity of frost without
the pain of coldness
autumn's sharp precisions and yet
for the green to stay.

Dark women clad in flat and functional leather
finger their breastsummers whispering
sisterly advice
one dreams of fish
lays her lips like spring across my chest
where I am scarred and naked
as a strip-mined hill in West Virginia
and against my office wall
a snapshot of the last Dahomeian Amazons
made in the year that I was born
three old Black women in draped cloth
holding hands.

A knout of revelation a corm of song
and love as a first condition
surrounding the acts of life
one woman harvesting
all I have ever been
lights up my sky like stars
or flecks of paint storm-flung.
The blast and seep of gone
remains
only the peace we make with it
shifts like the seasons
lengthening past equinox
sun wind come round again
seizing us in her arms like a warrior lover
or blowing us into the shapes
we have avoided for years
as we turn
we forget what is not possible.

breastsummer—a breastplate, also a wooden beam across an empty place

CALL

Holy Ghost woman
stolen out of your name
Rainbow Serpent
whose faces have been forgotten
Mother loosen my tongue or adorn me
with a lighter burden
Aido Hwedo is coming.

On worn kitchen stools and tables
we are piecing our weapons together
scraps of different histories
do not let us shatter
any altar
she who scrubs the capitol toilets, listening
is your sister's youngest daughter
gnarled Harriet's anointed
you have not been without honor
even the young guerilla has chosen
yells as she fires into the thicket
Aido Hwedo is coming.

I have written your name on my cheekbones
dreamed your eyes flesh my epiphany
most ancient goddesses hear me
enter
I have not forgotten your worship
nor my sisters
nor the sons of my daughters
my children watch for your print
in their labours
and they say Aido Hwedo is coming.

I am a Black woman turning
mouthing your name as a password
through seductions
self-slaughter
and I believe in the holy ghost
mother
in your flames beyond our vision
blown light through the fingers of women
enduring and warring

outside your name
we do not choose our rituals
Thandi Modise winged girl of Soweto
brought fire back home in the snoot of a mortar
passes the word from her prison cell whispering
Aido Hwedo is coming.

Rainbow Serpent who must not go unspoken
I have offered up the safety of separations
sung the spirals of power
and what fills the spaces
before power unfolds or flounders
in desirable non-essentials
I am a Black woman stripped down
and praying
my whole life has been an altar
worth its ending
and I say Aido Hwedo is coming.

I may be a weed in the garden of women
I have loved who are still
trapped in their season
but even they shriek
as they rip burning gold from their skins
Aido Hwedo is coming.

We are learning by heart
what has never been taught
you are my given fire-tongued
Oya Seboulisa Mawu Afrekete
we are mourning our sisters
lost to the false hush of sorrow
to hardness and hatchets and childbirth
we are shouting
Rosa Parks and Fannie Lou Hamer
Assata Shakur and Yaa Asantewaa
my mother and Winnie Mandela are singing
in my throat the holy ghosts linguist
one iron silence broken
Aido Hwedo is calling calling
your daughters are named
and conceiving
Mother loosen my tongue
or adorn me
with a lighter burden
Aido Hwedo is coming.

Audre Lorde

MINNIE BRUCE PRATT

USUALLY WE ARE NOT FOOLED BY DESPAIR

So everyone asks *what do you think of Washington?*

This week suddenly it is where the spinning bomb will drop.

Out my window at sunset suddenly screams from each row house
open windows, between silver iron bars, marigolds: usually no sounds:
or a party, Joan Armatrading: or tambourines, praying:

now it's the town screaming.

In one heartbeat, the sky will flash
the end: when I blink, the sky will come in my window and eat me.

But I can see that the dome of the Capitol glows unvaporized
in the long orange light.

Its men did a week's work moving
MX missiles like checkers on the map: are home watching TV football,
the local team win: *Thirty-three last seconds!* they are screaming
with my neighbors.

So I ask myself *how do*
you like Washington?

looking down Maryland Avenue on the grid,
spoke of the wheel to the hub, the dome poking up:

the hill
on the grid of mutually assured destruction where I live now
near you:

sleep with you in my bed every other night, my skin
lapping quietly at yours like a tongue: below us the dome
never blinks over the white of its lit sleepless eye:

in the morning
we drink black tea with milk: the sun goes down the streets
between houses, creek between rocks, shiny rooftops: the dome
a white cloud that does not move.

If the end comes you say
suddenly *I hope I am with you like this.*

I see us from a distance
like a movie, except the panorama shifts:

in this town you were left to die
in the fifties with your mother, the times your father went to live
inside a secret mountain dome of rock:

it could be the town
I grew up in, the courthouse reared up in the middle, my father
at his desk inside, inside his skin like pale metal, his white fear
annihilation.

But usually we are not fooled by despair,
not even when a helicopter whacks the air with spinning knives
just above my roof: when it returns again, again
with its bulging eye: when we know the police are hunting for
someone.

Even then, with you I can believe a possible future
with the domed hub unable to spin the world around it: and sudden
lively vertigo when people in millions push at the rim.

Harder
to imagine exactly how to move my fear.

At the slow end
of the day I walk my street: There is a yard, small, diagonal,
outlandish in a row of regimented lawns. A woman has set out
painted rocks asymmetrically, clorox bottles with marigolds,
with pink touch-me-nots. She has stuck silverblue delicate pinwheels,
plastic windmills, in the bushes. They click like tambourines,
like mouths; they dilate and close, pupils of eyes. It is all
hurly-burly, topsy-turvy, vertigo: hope: the world
imagined new again.

I am curious what we will make new
here.

THE FACT OF THE GARDEN

With this rain I am satisfied we will be together
in the spring. Seeds of water on my window glass,
transparent sprouts and rootlets; in your backyard
steady rain through the heavy dirt we dug in,
our shovels excavating some history of the tiny garden.

Our blades cut through the design of a previous digger,
rotting boards, rocks, earthworms big as young snakes;
a tarnished spoon, pink champagne foil from a party;
a palmful of blue feathers from a dead jay.

We dug and planted; we intend to have a history here
behind this rented house. Despite the owner there is a secret
between us and the ground. In the wet dirt, our fleshy bulbs
and the pink cloves of garlic are making nests of roots.

The fact of the garden has satisfied me all morning:
that we worked side by side, your name round
when I spoke it; that my fingers worked in the dirt like rain,
the ground a made bed with its mulch of leaves,
orderly, full of possibilities, acts of love
not yet performed.

Now the water splat
on my window has made me think of something else, suddenly,
what I don't want to, the way I wake up in the night,
think I've heard a gun shot.

The memory of the news story
you told me, a week ago: the farmers south,
far south, El Salvador, afraid to go into their fields.
What does their dirt look like? I don't know.
Instead I see that some thing is being planted:
U.S. soldiers watching as others bury a dead
hand, arm, head, torso.

To be afraid
to put your hand into the dirt. To be afraid to go
look at your ground: that it has been cut like skin,
will bulge out like cut muscle: that on a fair day
there will be subterranean thunder, then a loud, continuous
hiss of blood.

I wish I could think only of the flowering
bulbs voluptuous in the spring.

The government has dug
into the lawn at the White House, planted ground-to-air
missiles, stony heads, near the beds of ceremonial tulips.

At any jet rumble I look for their armless bodies
rising to kill.

What is planted is what comes.
In the fall plant stones; in the winter the ground gapes
with stones like teeth.

They are fortifying public buildings
against people who would make history different:
concrete barricades as if we were trucks thundering dynamite.

I hold to the plan we thought of: small: full
of possibilities against despair:

us handing out
sheets of paper, thousands: the list of crimes:
sharp thin papers delving up something in people
in parking lots, shopping malls.

What will come of this?
perhaps people to stand with us outside the buildings,
to say again: *Not in my name*: words adamant
as rock. And that, here, in the coldest months,
before soldiers move again in the fields to the south.

Minnie Bruce Pratt

TERRI MEYETTE

Pima County Jail

Like the experimental monkey
Whose insight gave him the ability
to stack boxes together and reach the bananas
I too am like the monkey.

In my cage, I become imaginative and insightful
pulling strings from inside tampax
to tie my hair into a braid.

The Next Painting

A gourd rattle, painted blue
Golden yellow rivets, upon the top
An opening . . .
A dream, a vision

A crack splinters, leaving rough crevices
an impressive hole,
Spring and Crows eggs hatching

The hole is a cave
taking up the whole canvas
and inside
Katchina spirits

Masks form in the dust of dry bones
and brittle memories
floating into past lives
of women and healers
of medicine men
masks of parrot and bear
of antelope, priest
and warriors painted red.

All I want to do is paint,
but this cell door won't open.





MARIA THEREZA ALVES

RECOVERING MY HISTORY:

BUTIA, BRAZIL

A JOURNAL IN PHOTOS & WORDS

I came to the U.S., New York, in October 1967. I was six years old, and until my early adolescence I was raised in Flushing, Queens. When I was twelve, my parents' financial situation had improved and we started to go to Brazil for three months every year. These visits left me with the urge to go down for a longer time to discover what Brazil was really all about, and most important, who my family was.

In 1982, I moved to Brazil for five months. I decided that my trip should begin with a return to my father's village, Butia, in the state of Parana. I had been there a few times as a child but in my adolescence only once for a rainy three days. On this trip I stayed two months with my Aunt Rose and Uncle Antonio. Through them I was able to meet the people in this community—Latin American peasants, who comprise the majority of our population.

The farming village of Butia is in the state of Parana in the south of Brazil. Parana is in Brazil's temperate zone. The name "Butia" derives from a small sweet yellow fruit that grows on squat palm trees, of which very few exist in Butia today.

Present day Butia seems to be one hundred years old coinciding with the completion of the railroad in that area. Parana had an influx of German and Polish immigrants in the early nineteenth century and a second wave in the later part of that century. Butia is comprised of these settlers who intermixed with Africans, Indians and Portuguese already there.

Butia is not a famous or well known area. It has no romantic history unlike other areas in Brazil; Minas Geras, the Amazon or the Northeast. It has no electricity or plumbing. Small farms made up of owners, squatters and renters comprise almost ninety percent of the area—about eight percent are middle size farms, and two percent consist of timber developers. Only four families have tractors, and only four more have cars.

There are no health services provided in Butia. Though they are farmers, there are some families who have no food and live from handouts, the others make do with a starch diet, and we must assume that some are starving (the official statistic is 50% of the Brazilian population live in chronic hunger).

The only visible assistance offered by the government is the maintenance of the road which allows for trade with the nearby town.

Farming families look to the cities as the only way out of their predicament, unaware of the unemployment rate in some areas of up to thirty percent. Even if jobs are found, the official minimum wage of forty dollars a month is insufficient for one person's needs let alone a family's.

The situation does not seem to be improving. Even though some liberal governors and congressmen were elected the economic policies are still implemented by the federal government. The new restrictions and demands being placed on Brazil, the most indebted developing nation, by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank—higher interest rates, curtailment of social services, and a decrease in wages—will not affect the runaway inflation but will instead have severe implications for rural and urban areas. Farmers will plant less, or totally give up altogether because of lack of government assistance and high interest rates.

What follows is distilled from many pages of notes and interviews which I made along with the many photographs I took. The stories are faithfully recorded but I have not tried to distance myself from the people or their situation; many of them are members of my family. They are some of the world's invisible people. My purpose is to show them and their world honestly, but with the kind of solidarity that can come from close scrutiny, and that can, therefore, endure.

Roseli Maria de Paula Martins

Born in 1955

Husband: Antonio Carlos Martins

Child: Antonio Altair Martins

This year they planted five acres of corn and beans. Fifty sacks of beans and thirty wagonloads of corn were harvested. Half of the corn will be sold for one-thousand cruzeiros a wagonload. Forty of the fifty sacks will be sold at five-thousand cruzeiros per sack. The income from this harvest was four hundred and thirty dollars. They were expecting to harvest one hundred and forty sacks of beans but the rains destroyed most of the crop.

Farming begins in August with the clearing of the land, which is ready for planting in late September. During the *rocada* in August, Aunt Rose and Uncle Antonio work from eight till six, but they must spend two hours traveling to and from the fields, which are one hour away.

When Rose gets home at seven she gets the fire going, and in one hour the supper will be ready. The leftovers are eaten for lunch the following day. During the *rocada* Aunt Rose does not get to rest on Sunday because she must wash clothes and clean the house.

Corn and beans are planted at the same time, but beans are harvested in January and corn in June. From March until May there is no farm work.

This year Uncle Antonio spent 130,000 cruzeiros for seed and fertilizer. He was to have paid the bill in February, but because of the rains there were not enough beans to cover the bill. He was then forced to sign another promissory note that increased the bill to 150,000 cruzeiros. If the bill is not paid by June there will be another increase.

Uncle Antonio also owes money to the bank; he used this money to feed the family last year from March to May. He also bought a house, a horse, a manual rice thresher, and a new wagon. After the bean harvest, he sold his horses, the rice thresher, and the wagon to pay off some of the bank loan, but he still owes 180,000 cruzeiros.

Antonio also owes money on the land he rented to farm. He is hoping that grandmother will give him two acres, but she does not like his wife, so I do not think he will get it.

From March to May the men of the poorer families try to find jobs in the city in construction or just trimming gardens; if they can not get jobs in town, they will work at plantations. Some try to stay with their family by doing any odd jobs in the village. This year the only farming jobs were with my Uncle Jose who had planted potatoes that are harvested during this period. The rains killed off most of the crop, so not many people were asked to pick. The average wage for picking is the equivalent of sixty American cents for a day's work.

Rose and Antonio own twenty chickens, one pig, and three goats. Three chickens are killed a month. Aunt Rose does not like to kill them because "if you have a chicken you will always have eggs." Rose had more chickens but they got a disease and died. She also had more goats, but two of them died from castration. "With one of them we had to lift him up after the castration, but he would just keep falling. He died of fear. The other one's cut got infected with worms and died."

Aunt Rose helps with the household income by washing clothes. She gets paid eighteen cents per dozen pieces. Rose must walk twenty-two steps with a metal pail from the wash tank to the well. The pail weighed down with a rock is thrown into the well. Rose then pours this water into another pail without a rock to take to the wash tank. She does this three more times to soap up the clothes. The clothes are then put out in the sun to whiten, while she gets four more pailfuls of water to soap up the clothes again and begin to rinse them. Four more pailfuls are needed to finish the rinsing.

Rose has walked 264 steps with a heavy bucket of water and washed clothes for two hours to earn 18¢.

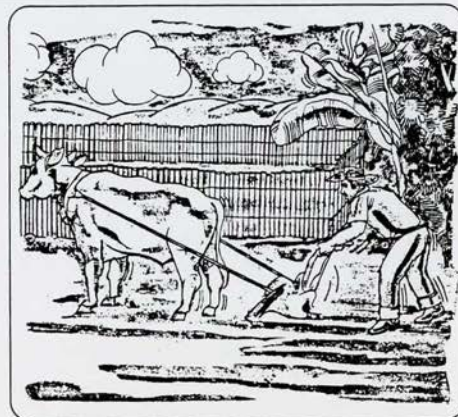
Grandmother does not like Rose because she is dark (as dark as my grandfather). Grandmother calls her, the "Black One." When grandmother first mentioned Rose to me she said, "That woman that Antonio married she is black, but she can wash clothes really clean."

When Antonio was sixteen he stole Rose, who was fourteen. He took her to grandmother's, proudly displayed his woman, and then asked grandmother what

RECAIDO

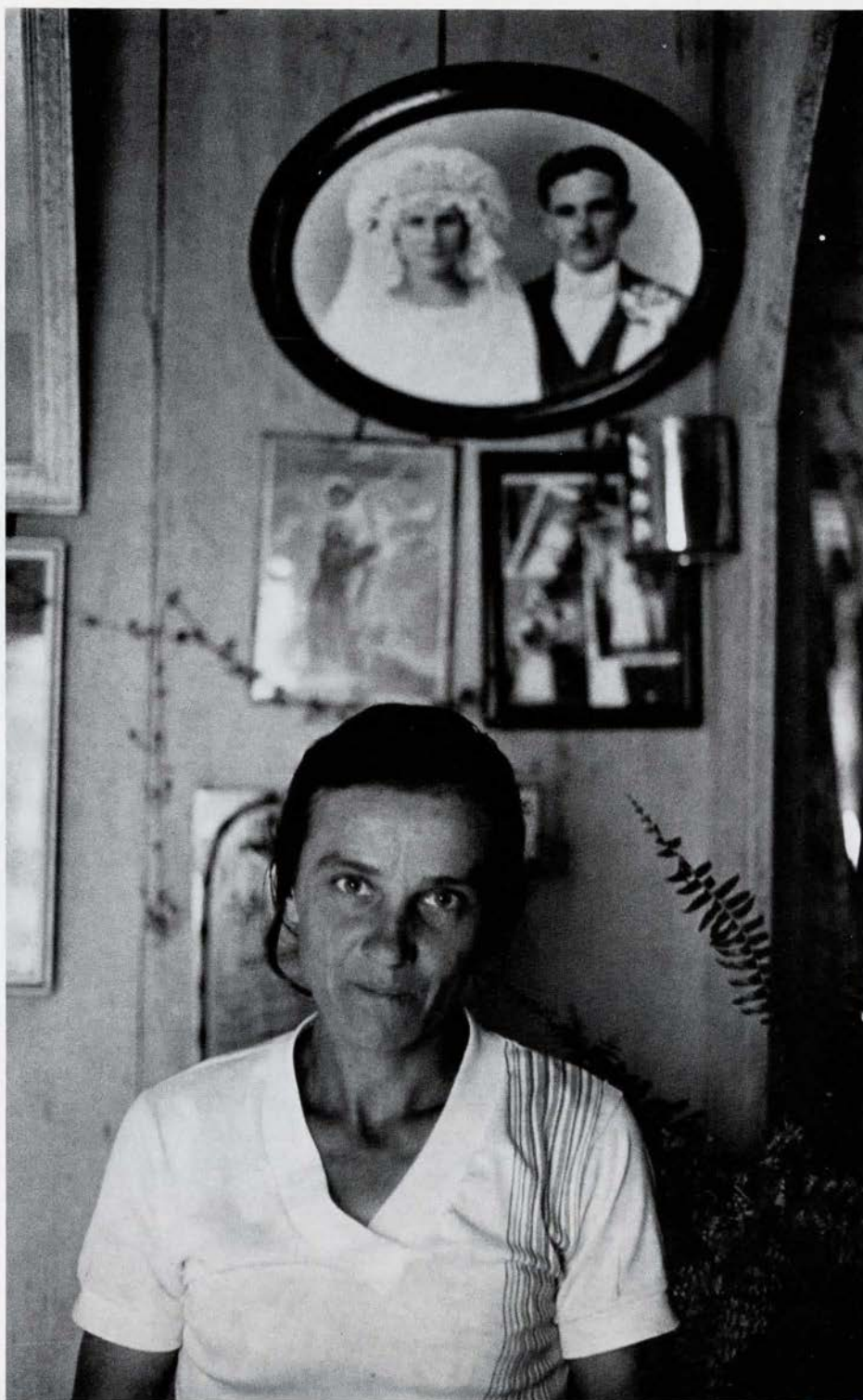
From a literacy book for adults.

This is Antonio.
He lives on a farm close to town.
On the farm, Antonio has some land,
where he harvests a lot of fruit,
plants vegetables, and raises chickens.
The fruits, vegetables, chickens and eggs
are to feed Antonio's family. There is
a lot left over.
What does Antonio do with the excess food?
He sells it in town.









he should do with Rose. Grandmother told him that since he stole her, he now had to marry Rose. They lived with grandmother for almost a year. Grandmother would encourage Antonio to go to the local parties, so he would enjoy his youth, but Rose would have to stay home to keep her company. After ten months, Rose left Antonio. She agreed to come back only if Antonio would take her to parties, and build them a house. In two days, Antonio built a little house for them.

Grandmother adopted Antonio when his mother died. His father was a little crazy. Once he accidentally set on fire his nephew's barn. As a joke the nephew said that he was going to get the police after him. The old man believed it. Everytime a car would pass through the village, he would think that it was the police after him and run hide in the woods. One day he ran into the woods and did not come back. Pieces of his body were found eight months later.

Last year from March to May, Rose and Antonio had bought food on credit (like all the other poor farmers) from Uncle Mauro. He charges interest for groceries bought on credit. His prices are also higher than the other local bodega which cannot afford to give credit. If Uncle Mauro finds out that a customer who has credit with him buys cheaper groceries at the other bodega, he lets the customer know that he found out.

During the harvest, Uncle Mauro has been known to send his hired hands to harvest the lands of customers he thinks will delay in repaying him. He left one family in the village without beans for the following season, so they had to buy beans from him.

In my cousin's textbook on morality (an obligatory course since the coup) it is pointed out that each person has obligations to fulfill in society. For example, "The obligation of a storeowner is to profit in commerce. The obligation of a policeman is to maintain order and punish the disorderly."

This year Uncle Antonio went to work at an American pine tree plantation called Aglo Flores. This plantation comprises five thousand acres. The entire area had been a virgin forest. The company is systematically burning all of it down. At the end of this project the only virgin forest left will be by the river's edge. Where once Brazilian pine trees grew (there is now only one large area in all of Brazil that still has these pines) American pines and eucalyptus trees have usurped their place. This is called reforestation. The company will get money from the government for planting those trees. The acidity of the American pines is detrimental to the soil inhibiting other plant growth. They have been called "Silent Forests" because one hears no birds due to the ecological imbalance.

The men on this plantation are paid by the amount of land they clear. This is a smart move by the company officials, since they do not have to pay the men for the days that they are unable to work because of the rains.

My uncle has not yet signed up with the company. There has been talk that the overseer does not pay the workers. Uncle Antonio will test it out for a week and see if he gets paid, if so then he will continue. Uncle Antonio is already wary because the company is going to give the men a wage based on the old official minimum wage.

The men will receive one minimum wage for clearing an acre, which the overseer says takes fifteen to twenty days, but which the men say will take

thirty. The men work ten hour days. They are responsible for their own meals, and for moving camp every four days.

For a week's stay on the plantation Uncle Antonio took with him: workpants and shirt, dresspants and shirt, suitcoat, hat, socks, sandals, bacon, corn flour, beans, rice, coffee, sugar, salt, bread, tobacco, a spoon and knife, and one candle. He cooked his food in old tin cans.

The company provides the men with plastic to make tents. They usually build a tent against the side of a hill to get some shelter from the wind, but because it has been raining hard, the water coming down the side of the hill gushes into their tents. After the first rains, the men were forced to make bed stands. The only transportation to their villages from the plantation is the company truck, which can not go up the hills when it rains.

Aunt Rose told me that near the fields they farm there is still some virgin forest, and sometimes you can hear strange noises. She explained that it is the spirits of the Indians roaming around, but that over the years there has been less noise, because the game is being killed off, and the spirits have no food to live on.

Aunt Rose had asked me what I thought about Indians. Much later on, she told me a conversation she had had with grandmother. "You said they are nice people? That they are good people? Your grandmother told me that my grandfather was a full blood Indian. I told her that it did not matter, because you had said that they are good people. Your grandmother got very quiet after that."

While I was at Rose's house I caught a cold, and I asked her uncle to get me some toilet paper and cough drops at the bodega. Rose told me to write it down because her Uncle Teco had never bought any of these things and would not remember what they are called.





Wilson and Marilena

Ardendo: old portuguese word for fire.

Esquamaritado: you are removed from your place.

Wilson likes to look up archaic Portuguese words in the dictionary. He told me that because I lived in the USA, I was *esquamaritado*.

This year Wilson voted for the opposition party, but since he had only recently become a resident of Butia, his voter registration was filed in his former town, São Mateus do Sul. There is no bus to São Mateus from Butia. Wilson was going to pay my Uncle Mauro to drive him to the highway, sixteen miles away, so he then could take the bus to town.

There are about half-a-dozen families in Butia that own cars, but they all vote for the government party. Wilson asked my uncle to drive him to the highway. My uncle asked him which party he was going to vote for. "For the opposition," Wilson replied. My uncle told him that he could walk to the highway. Wilson explained that he was going to pay for the ride. Uncle told him that he could still walk. Wilson walked the sixteen miles, took the bus to São Mateus and voted for the opposition.

Wilson, like almost every other Brazilian man, had served in the army for the mandatory one year. He was in the kitchen detail. One time, an American general came to visit—it was a special occasion. Wilson was given a recipe for Stroganoff, he remembers that there were 52 ingredients. Wilson said that at that time it was the fanciest dish in Brazil. After the meal, the general told them he didn't like it. Wilson showed me a picture of himself serving the general, and another one of him and his friends lounging around the dinner table after the general had left.

Wilson showed me his keepsakes box. There was a check book, "From the time we used to have money in the bank." Four bullets, a souvenir from the army, which his wife polishes once in awhile. A pen, he got as a present, and one earring of cheap metal, painted gold that Marilena, his wife, is going to send to the jewelers to melt down and make into a ring.

Marilena worked at the Ouro Verde Supermarket in Canoinhas. At first, she priced the groceries, but her supervisor kept looking at her and found out that she didn't know how to read numbers. She was then demoted to shelving the groceries. It was hard work, and one day when she was resting, the supervisor told her to go see the boss. She was fired. She asked the boss why, he told her that she didn't need to know.

Marilena told this story to Teco, who insisted that when the new bodega was opened in a neighboring village, the owners would put him in charge. Marilena told him the story, so that he would know that they wouldn't put "people like us" in charge of a bodega.

She then told the story of a friend, the daughter of Carlos Padilha. She went to work as a maid in town. She was told to make mayonnaise, something she had never made before. She got a bottle of ingredient confused with a bottle of bleach. She didn't know what the label said. The employer fired her.

Marilena told me she was very happy at moving to this new house because in the six months that they were there, Wilson had not beat her. She told me that the house was blessed. Wilson told me that he treats his animals well, and never whips them like his neighbors.

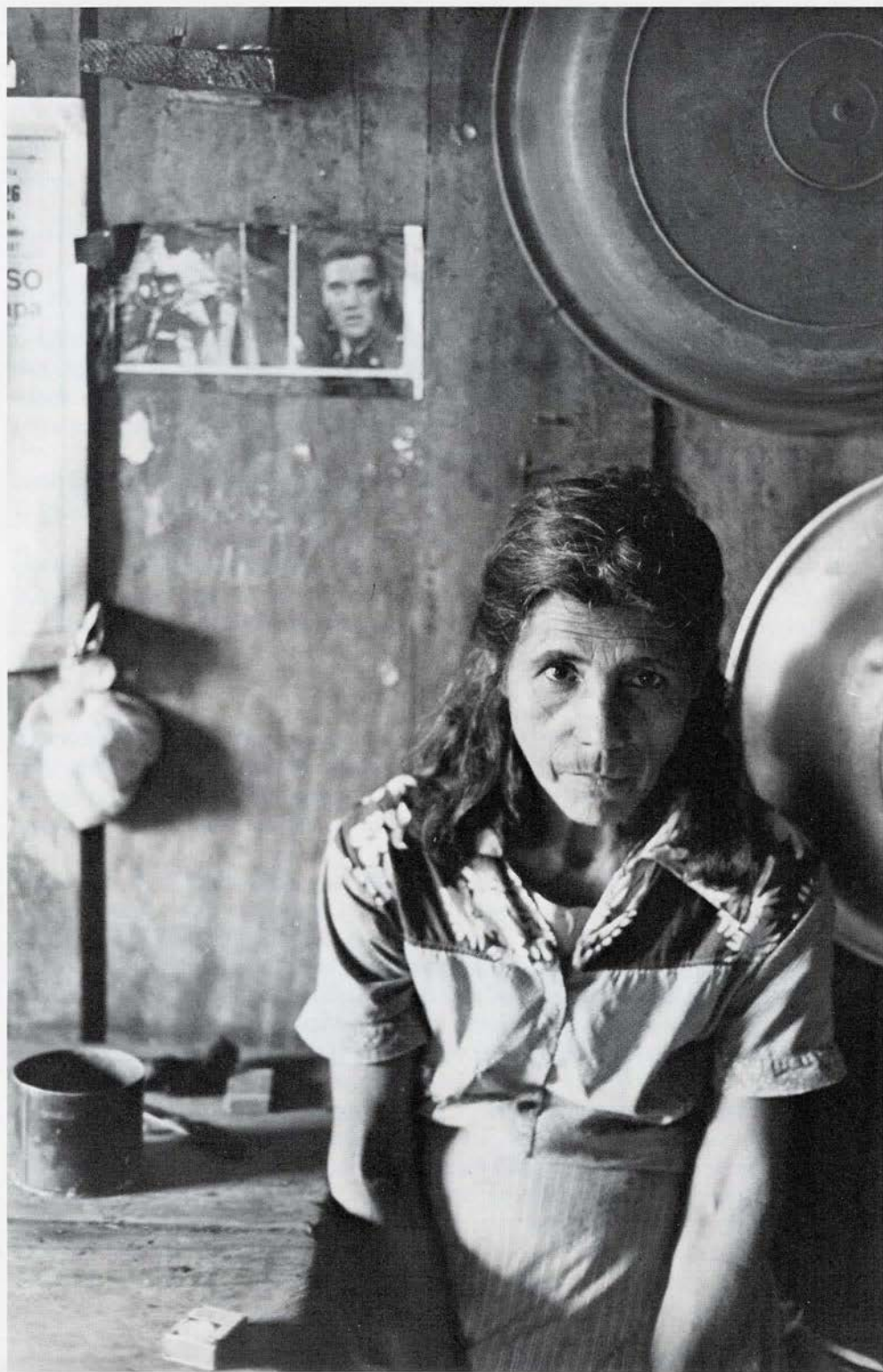
Marilena is Wilson's second wife; the first one left him because he beat her too much.

Marilena complained that the community, especially the neighbor that lives in front, gossips about her and other men. Everytime a man in a car or wagon stops to ask after Wilson, the neighbor asks ironically, "Did they come to talk to Wilson, again?" One day, she played a trick. Wilson was told beforehand. She asked a friendly neighbor to dress herself as a man. "She came to visit me, and I met her outside. We made believe that we kissed, then she came in and I locked up the house." The neighbor gossiped. When Marilena told the community about the trick, the neighbor was embarrassed.

Marilena told me the only thing I could take back with me from Butia is homesickness, because there was nothing else to take.







MOSQUITOES IN THE MAIN ROOM

MEENA ALEXANDER

The following piece is based on a true happening, in Hyderabad, in 1978.

Rameeza is almost my age, just a year and a half younger. Her mouth is filled with dust. She is numb, she does not even scratch herself. For an instant, she squints at the old woman who peers in through the bars. No – she tries to shake her head, she doesn't want any water. She stares at the old woman's scrawny feet, the waterpot scarred with moisture.

There is nothing Rameeza can say. Does she know there is blood, crushed bone in her pelvis? Nothing hurts her. It would be true to say she feels nothing. A single mosquito whirrs above her lips. In a blur, she watches its wings.

Hours later, a whole day later, she feels a single sore on her inside thigh, where the cur dog licked her. Had she felt it then? Hard prods of lathi in her ribs, the racking pain in her belly, the hairs on her vulva exposed, burning shamefully?

* * *

Did the policemen take fright at what they had done, under cover of darkness? It might be more correct to say that as true sons of the Indian bureaucracy, they were overcome by the urge to clean up. Two of them dragged Rameeza by the armpits. As her hips hit the stone steps, they burst in pain, each bone in cadence as the marble struck.

Tin cans clattering at his bicycle, the milk man approached. It was dawn already, thrusting open the swamp, shutting up the eyes of the night owls. A decent fellow, the milkman fell off his machine in shock. The milk cans broke open. Over the red pebbles, the dried bloodstains, over the eyelids of the cur dog, even over the boots of the satiated policemen a slim line of milk flowed. I think the sparrows stirred in the tall grasses, under the swamp.

Her sari hung under her, a mere rag, dark with blood. She does not have Draupadi's luck. Would the blessed Draupadi have survived a rape, outside a police station? Would the mystic fabric have guarded her virtue, shimmering as it bound her flesh and burnt the hands of miscreants?

The cell door is rusty, it clangs like an old bell left over by the British. Now the blood has dried in her eyes, in her mouth. It's another twelve hours before the old woman returns with her water pot, before the cur dog filled with a woman's dropped blood vomits into the swamp. The swamp is behind the cell window. Sparrows rustle in the tall grasses. The milkman trembles as he gathers his cans together and races away from the policeman in charge. He pushes his bent

bicycle ahead of him, away from the stone steps with the two slender pillars at the top.

Make no mistake, the police station is a modest building as befitting the locus of justice. Like all the public service buildings in Haddam it is white washed. In the main room there's a low wooden platform with three chairs set on it, all in a row. In front of the three chairs is a large wooden table, a leather bound book propped open on it, a steel pen attached to the spine with a bit of string. Behind the chairs are the two small cells. If you peer away from the policeman who sits in the middle chair, his face overshadowed by a stiff cap, you can see into the cells. Partially, for when Rameeza curls up into a tight ball, on the mud floor of her cell, it's impossible to see her from the main room of the police station.

In the main room, the floor under the platform falls into a depression that deepens in the cells. At monsoon time a stagnant water pools in a hole breeding mosquitoes. In the dry season the depression is damp, cool to the flesh, welcoming the parched prisoners. Rameeza makes it a habit to curl up in the darkness. The mud soothes her a little, she barely feels the mosquitoes.

* * *

Mosquitoes surround the two portraits hung above the platform in the main room of the police station. To the right, in faded brown ink, is a man with parted lips, tiny round spectacles and a bent nose. He looks puzzled. He is smiling a little. He's bald. He holds a telephone in his hand. Where did the phone come from? Is the line good? It's Gandhi. The mosquitoes crowd into his eyes. One even seems to have bored through his spectacles into the lime dust behind.

Then there is Nehru. Erect, handsome, his cap pointed, polished on his head. His teeth are visible, clearly brushed each morning. An aristocrat, lacking a phone line with the future. Both these visitors from our history watched as the mosquitoes shimmered over her wrist, then as she was tossed into the cell, her knees folded under her, saw the mosquitoes flock, beating their wings, hovering over her mouth seeking entry. Do they know that her story is not finished?

Grandmother's Mirror

for Jayanta who still listens

(Grandmother was born in 1884, into the Syrian Christian community in Kerala. She inherited her mirror.)

1.

Grandmother's mirror, still
oval, rimmed in silver
from her dead sister's dowry,
speckled as glass gets
or eggshell tossed into ash.

Her room was immaculate:
a four poster bed carved out of rosewood
a wicker chair, a footstool
inlaid with ivory.
Awed at her ruined back

we crouched, whispering like the silk
tucked to her waist that fled
downwards in points like
waves in the otherworldly paintings
riveted to her walls.
A Virgin, black wrists crossed
sat straight by a rock on Gallilee's sea.
Gulls lost themselves,
waves swallowed up the sky.
Only the metal frame protected me
from watery consumption
though the Virgin, bolt upright
as was her wont noticed nothing.

"So great her innocence"
grandmother coughed, locking gold rings,
the pearls she should never have worn
they were said to bode ill,
still simmering in her hot flesh.
That year she turned seventy.

Unlike the Virgin whose eyes were hooded
grandmother's glared.
We slipped to our knees
petticoats roaring in the gusts
from her mouth.

Yet there was sometimes about her
a savor of lint.
The Good Shepherd had it too
in the gathers of his gown
in the odd swirl of sheep's wool
caught in a thorn at his feet.
I much preferred that painting
though grandmother arbiter of all
argued "He has a woman's mouth"
so marked her disapproval.

I do not think He cared for her much, either.
When the floor cracked under her
when her brown feet
slipped like hen's claws
into the fissure
He knew nothing about it.
Nor did we
tucked side by side
under reams of mosquito netting,
mouths moist with dreams.

2.

It was three years later
that the koil, crying all night
into the river disturbed us
and we erred through the unlit house
pinching each other to keep awake.
Where the Virgin had kept sanctity
where the Shepherd warmed the white wall
a rusty nail or two, a slip of wire
unreal all.
Only the mirror
rocking on its legs:
it severed us.
Pitched from each other
we held, doubled in the vertigo of childhood.
Gowns hemmed with sweat
mere shadows that summer.

I swore never to forget.
3.

Wind skims the river
moonlight mottles the guava bark,
tonight, for the first time
I feel our childhoods
would not amount to much
in anyone else's almanac.
Ash pits where hen feathers quiver
Bibles filled with darkness
our dates inscribed inside
Like welts on grandmother's palm
where boiling oil dropped.

Odds and ends: worry beads
smooth as olives,
a starched scarf printed
with sun and stars,
an *ayah* who polished chairs,
bedstead, spitting bowls
with her flesh
then strolled backwards
still waving, into water.
Three days they searched
in the black stuff the Pamba river
throws up and didn't find her.

4.

Have you heard?
Grandmother's house is stripped
her gold borne into ground.
The koil's skin

hangs from her scaffolding.
It shines in the night.

I have saved her mirror,
set its cracked legs in my room.

Your sight was always keen
you were dazzled by very little.

To get a little closer
I imagine becoming like you
a rasp to the toil of light,
difficult to snare
no silver rim of you,
just freckles of black stuff
—a pomfret at night—
birthed right and stenching.

Shall I rinse you
to an image the moon
can covet?
You wince in my eyes.

Come to me sister:

my figures cut in a rocking glass
pitch, then double themselves,
tragic concupiscence
that heals nothing.
Come, if not for what we were
in childhood,
ferocious with truth,
or now, restless, impenitent,
then for a pungent self
still clasped
between the two.

The koil without a skin
cries into my water.

Will I fall
to the sounding
of your blood?

- Meena Alexander

On Not Keeping House

Shall I live in a house
that tilts to its side
crashing through scrub oak
and elm
the delicate reason
of wild strawberry,
the ceiling fans
still going
cutting ground
with white blades
revealing my earth?

I bend and remove
a small stone
a secret I made,
the lime face
blind with dirt
carved as if paradise
were here in my flesh
the heart of it all
blurred into stone
into sweat from
a stolen penknife

the disparate edges
of garden
jasmine and thyme
vine and wild grass
tucked again into a mirror
a nothing-to-be-aware of scene,
so patiently there,
as if mother herself
had turned

unfolding brown hands
the wedding ring
preposterous
so much heavier than stone
hurting
as it cut the glass pane
when at seven
mute and divided,
glimpsing myself
for the first time
I slipped through her clasp
and leapt . . .

- Meena Alexander

so there is no poetry in these nites



so there is no poetry in these nites.

i do not speak this language
but another
fluent as hieroglyph
filled with click and bop and guttural sounds
i do not overstand these runnings

bantu
education
group
areas act
influx
control
displacing
surrounding
intervening
so afrikaners, so apartheid, moves my people.

i do not speak this language
i cry bullets
so young, warriors, they bleed
hippos tore them down
on street corners in school uniform
so these children on the frontline
and even as the fast run and the strong
walk way beyond the shootings these bars
grate against voice like glass grinding
on chalkboard the tear gas and the sirens
and the flashing orange lites threaten
to drive them insane and they bleed
chanting
so to speak in their own language

ghetto
township
redline
dispossess
gentrify
break
break
break

word . . .

not this language but another these
runnings the question glances of children
the rumblings of empty stop the word the
appetite for nitewalks or freedom fighters
what you know of the force the power
of the spoken the scratch the beat
they would kill you for ritual knowledge
of the real deal.

so speak to me so in my country
in i language in i woman in i
heart so speak to me . . word . .
the kids cry in new york city
in soweto graffiti me so so speak.

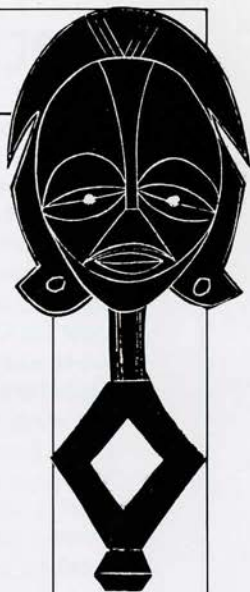
so there is no poetry in these nites
'cept the writing on walls. so they tough
but babies. they bleed, policemen hunt them
in brooklyn in cieski in soweto torn down
on street corners and even as the fast run
and the strong walk away gunfire bars grate
against expression policemen hunt them grate
tear gas. chalkboards. school uniforms. sirens
rushing thru my city where liberation is the writing
their words
their writing
tag
on the walls.

two poems
GALE JACKSON

the untitled

it is the women
who are left
as we are tonite.
you. me.
the women left
holding photographs
missing the gone
the assassinated
burying the dead
quickly
to give the heart
of the baby just died
to a weak one
so that both should
continue
to live
the mothers
of heroes and martyrs
the women conscious
of the pain
of losing any children
tho she may look
at the womanchild
and see her husband
cause she doesn't know
her own strength.
women
from sophiatown
which is no more
from alexandria
and bedsty still
they remember
like the bronx
never leaves you
the ones
late nite
going off the walls
alone
lonely
very strong
their ghosts remain
even as the cities
are swept away
not fearing blood pus
maggots

only the absence
of ritual
or kindness
but on these nites
ice cold
crystal clear
they know it
deeply as sorrow.
it is the women
who are left
in the bantulands
in the ghettos
they do not choose
or name
squatting over some
other people's dead
when the men go
to the cities
to war
insane
when the last good stream
has gone dry
and the check won't
come
when the lovers go
she is left
stop
to sit
be company
for a friend
left
when there is no right.
sleep
for dreams.
and if no one dare
wake her dare break
her pact with god
she may leave and never
return
to this
false version of life
gaining a foothold
she may decide
to soar.



A Letter Concerning Women

Dear Gale, I started to write about the women,
the women waiting and the women digging
through mounds of dirt, their arms flinging
rocks, bits of clothing, nothing,
elbow deep in ash and grime,
the women calling out,
sleepwalking and never sleeping,
their children's paper faces pinned to their breasts,
white scarves imprinted with the names of the missing
bound around their heads,
the women scratching at shadows on walls,
looking down dark tunnels,
lifting up anything,
staring into corners,
women identifying bodies in police stations,
meeting every train, clipping newspapers.

Dear Gale, I started to write about the women
stopping traffic sitting in the dusty road for days,
dodging gunfire, in the smoky, gritty road in a cluster,
the women in doorways at knifepoint,
their children stabbed away from them in morning light,
the boys rounded up by a bullhorn warning.
I started to write as the train crawled past the orange yellow mural
on 111 Street, past 145 and Lincoln Hospital, past 249 Street
and I saw women leaning out on the grating
of their apartment windows watching the train go by,
the long horn resonating.

I read out loud the names of the towns on the wooden signs
at each station stop: Croton, Everdale, Hudson
as we headed up towards green where the trees
marched out and the fields opened,
away from broken glass streets and the cuchifritos signs
clicking on,
away from Sydenham and Charlotte Street,
up towards Albany, Albany, Albany that foreign country,
the Capitol of this great state, my stop and the town
where a Black man was shot four times yesterday
by cops in daylight, in his home,
once in the head, once in the lip, the eye and the chest.



three poems
KATHY ENGEL

Dear Gale, I was going to write about the women
who showed me pictures of their dead sons and the women
who have no pictures
the women embroidering into the night
embroidering the night with name, date, town, number fallen,
the women and their mothers who rocked their children
when they crept through the mountains,
hand-made grenades sweating their palms,
the women who made the grenades, in their laps, in the dark,
and hid them,
and women who should be girls but at 15
stake out in the hills to make sure no enemy passes.

Dear Gale, I visited Alexis last night in the hospital,
one of the woman-est parts of her aching.
I asked if she had seen the New York Times two days in a row—
the women in Beirut in the street demanding their loved ones back,
and she leaned over in her hospital nightgown,
the ring in her dreads slipping out,
her voice lowered to a sea whisper,
eyes eating the air around her
and she said yes, the women
all over the world

and when I returned home I found your poem, Gale,
the untitled
and the book I've been carrying around for weeks, *Widows*.

no it is not a strange coincidence
that we are all waking to the voices
of the women who are
as you say
left
they have told their stories into our blood
their hands are the history of the world
warm and folded over and aching and gripping
their faces are the earth holding its claim
to what it yields
their feet are compasses
their footprints are survival,
the names of their children breathe in the pockets of heat
where their feet press into the ground day after day in the search.

Dear Gale, I started to write about the women
and my young sister lifted her infant soft son
into the safe cove of her body
his tiny arms rubbery, his very own untouched
grammarless tongue gurgling in his mouth

and Alexis raised her arms in the hospital bed
the night before the operation

reaching out and said next time you see me
I'll be so strong

and so I came home and read your poem about the women
I read it out loud to myself and to the room and
to the moonless lake and the no-star sky and to the
sleeping man beside me scratching at his black fly bites
and I talked myself into something like sleep
hearing Gale, Alexis, Susie hearing
we will not rest
until the road is safe
for our children to travel
we will not rest
they will not pass
our children will choose.

Love Poem

to my mother

You said there are those who are really there
and those who aren't.
I dreamt I twirled my hair into dreadlocks.
I dreamt of an infant in a burning barn with horses rearing.
I dreamt of women carrying rifles in the night.
I dreamt French phrases thinking it was Spanish.
I want to tell you what it means to me
this family of women
dear mother
did you ever imagine I'd be this age
did you ever imagine the danger?
Each night I dream an alert I've forgotten to sound.
I wake to a scarf of light scraping the lake
lilies popping out
like pistols.
So quiet the whirl of motors and insects
is a warning.

Tell them to stop killing us sisters
she says so far away
in the swell of heat in that country
of green like these trees
where they won something
for themselves
somewhere near Miami
as she walks in the uncounted hours
when the clock gives way to stars
checking each corner with the others
as the daycolors beat into night
like clothes worked against a washboard

the clothes of
Jose Maria Rosa Pepe all the ones
pulled from their homes into shreds
strewn across the country like flags.

The infant and the horses in my dream are
the daughter I imagine, my failure, my sister.
The alert I forgot to sound
is everything I need to tell you.
I eat a slow breakfast
and wait to pick the news from the paper
like ticks off a dog.
Three jets rehearse the sky cracking it open.
A duckling scoots up the mother duck's back

then slides off and goes at it again.
It's not necessary to say everything.
I say there are friends and enemies
and the undetermined danger
of those who don't choose
or trespass trust.
The men on the commission will lose.

I want to write beautiful lines for you
to embarrass myself with risk
reading reason
like a vowel between love
and the nub of urgency
rubbing between us.

Today



In the Black Hills FBI agents hunt Indians.
Deer leap to safety here in Monadnock.
Young men sign up for a license to kill.
The sun sets regardless,
a last splash releasing the room from its walls.

At the wooden table, coffee mugs wrapped in our hands,
Louise and I meet in transit. We're tending
someone's house, wipe up every crumb, sponge off the spills
and breathe into photographs, say the names aloud.
At ten my best friend and I pricked our fingers,

pressed the tips together and traded blood.
Here with my new friend
we lie down each alone in separate rooms to dream.
Our unfilled curves fill the air.
We drink pots of coffee, build a fire

that will sputter and wheeze with maple, birch
and balled up newspaper until the house creaks with night.
Hiroshima, Nagasaki. The consonants slip
from our tongues like ice into water.
We've come to these woods to reconstruct.

Louise is Chippewa. With tapered fingers
she digs up her tribe's treaty, holds it
to light, measures dimensions. I take out
the t-square to get the angles right, saw off
chunks of wood and work at putting things back together.

We write letters home, pencil in our progress.
The trees move into their winter skins.
Grey limbs slice the sky; soon Louise will get on a bus.
The stars tell us we're circled by a common moon.
The trees won't leave. Maybe something we build will last.

JUDITH McDANIEL

excerpts from METAMORPHOSIS

THE DESCENT

She lived in a time when stability
not change was the key to safety
a time that said dismantling the missiles
and warheads was destabilizing.
Balance she heard them say requires stasis
but she saw smoke hovering on the horizon
of every city she drove toward and held
in her memory the hawk balanced
on a trembling wing and she knew
the old tree grown rigid against the wind
was the tree that fell.

And yet for years
her worst nightmare found her in an unknown
future alone without a landscape. Nothing
in that nightmare future was familiar
nostalgia was connected to a known and vanished
past. She'd wake touch the woman
sleeping familiarly close and sleep again
sure the dream was just a fluke
surely surely she knew what her future
held knew that potential landscape
as surely as she knew the arm she touched.

The rooms grew darker imperceptibly
the rooms in which she lived her life
and tried to build a present filled
with light. Looking back she could find
no single moment no single room
or voice or face to mark the turning
when the circle became a spiral
when the way led only down.

I always wanted what I
was not supposed to want.
I don't remember the child
of four or five who told
the reporter she wanted
to be a boy named Tommy

and own a pet pig but
last year my grandmother
gave me the clipping
out of the family bible
and there I was wide-eyed
and smiling. Why not Tommy?
My script read different:
college marry mommy.
I tried to take the cues
that came my way
but that other me held back
clamped down tight
I waited.

She drank when she was tired for the strength
to see her through, she drank when she was angry
for the strength to hold it back, she drank
when she felt strongly so the feeling wouldn't
show, she drank when she felt nothing
to bring the feeling back. She
drank when she was the only one, the different
one, the one who had to make the difference
who had to lead the way, who showed where
to begin. She drank when being different
made others feel afraid, left her standing
all alone.

Nice. That was the thing
in our family, that I should
be nice, no matter what else
the neighbors should know
how nice I was. Be nice,
what a nice girl, how cute.
Tommy, you say?
So when I stood up
in front of all those people
who wanted me to do something
or be someone, I wanted them
to like me and think I was nice
even when I was telling them that
who I was went against everything
they ever believed in or even
when I was telling them to fight,
to believe in themselves
and fight for what they needed,
still I thought they should think
I was nice. Once I told a friend
I thought people should like me
more, since I was basically
nice. Nice? She asked. Nice?
Don't sell yourself short.
You're not nice.

Peace seemed worth having, personal peace, the place she could go deep inside herself and not have to listen to the voices. Sometimes weeding the garden, writing in a journal, hearing different music and the call of each bird, then she felt at peace. But more often she would hear the voice and remember her script and so she would answer and go and be or do whatever was required.

And when she had to shut them out she drank and when she had to go out to meet them she drank and when she drank she thought it was they who would not let her in.

So that the rooms grew darker and the air she breathed seemed to have all been breathed before.

I shook all day of the night
I went to talk about how maybe
I was ready to think about
not drinking. I'd been alone
for two weeks, told myself I didn't
have a problem. Others made it up.
And if no one was there to see
I'd find my natural level. I did.
And couldn't breathe at all when
I woke up. I was scared.
Scared. I didn't know why
but I was shaking inside and it
worked its way out to my hands
and my voice when I spoke. All day
I said, hey, it's nothing to be
afraid of, and I was afraid.
I'd thought that death was the end
of changing, but this change
felt like death.

Later she would put the lies in here too
but she hadn't gotten that far then
couldn't see how she'd found the peace
by lying. She used the lies to shut
them all out, to create a false and private
place and finally the lies
came between her and the woman sleeping
close and when she'd reach to touch
her arm, she wasn't sure
who she would find there.

We each come differently to that place
where there is nothing left. We reach out
to touch firm ground and find
we've already gone down further even
than that and there is no room to turn,
to shift, no room to move at all
or breathe. The earth sat on her chest
like yesterday's promises.

I felt like an animal
gnawing my own leg
to get out of the trap
and the blood tasted
like metal.

She breathed quietly the mute untested
air of the world in which she woke,
longed for the welcoming songs
without knowing what she longed for,
because she had feared this change
like death and she came—a different
kind of creature—back into this
world where yesterday today and tomorrow
were supposed to be the same, a world
in which the old ways were the good ways,
and yet for her the old ways led
only to that place where there was nothing
left and when she came to that place
she knew it now for what it was
and turning she began the journey out.

THE FLOWERS

She gave them to me with a smile
and said to write a poem about
anemones I said poems weren't
made that way smiled carried them
out to my car where the furious
color of tight anemone buds
mocked the early winter dark.

And so I became a woman
with anemones furled tight
on stems borne down by the weight
of all that color carmine lilac
amethyst heads stretched above emerald
leaves curled in a loose fist beneath
the blooms. When one stem bent

and the flower lay limp on the table
I plucked it from the vase
and stuffed it without thought
into the trash where an hour later
I retrieved the stem and flattened
petals. Chastened at last by her
admonition I imagined these quartz

clear colors against the clean
falling wet snow imagined the ceremony
imagined laying the eight spent blooms
together under the boughbent lilac
tree to keep company with the winter
chickadee and did. Now I
have been a woman with anemones

who saw (like the painter who gave
the gift) the necessity of ceremony
in colors so deep and clear
the empty ache of a still room
focussed and pulled to center
around their presence
who remembers the shadow of colors

on the snow as the lilac branches
loosened and the chickadee eyed
this brilliant intrusion who lives
in a room where there has been more
than today who knows no loss
is pure loss

for I remember carmine
on the snow and face
the center of a room
empty with potential.

JUDITH McDANIEL

HENRY

Barbara Cameron

November 1. It was a grey and very chilly day. Lifeless. Muted grey skies, muted dried and brown prairie. Still, without wind, but the chilliness always makes it feel like there is a wind. Years ago when I was a kid, these cold November days were some of my favorites. I would run outside, galloping around like my horse Cricket or play hide and seek near my grandfather's wood pile. But this isn't one of those days.

I'm dressing in my mother's room, black on black. Now I know where my clutter comes from. Curlers, magazines, money and socks on her dresser. My little brother Russell comes in and out. Not at all embarrassed to see an adult woman getting dressed. We look at each other in the mirror but we pretend not to. He comes in always with that side glance toward me just like three years ago when I last saw him. Monica says he really loves school and throws a fit if he has to miss it. We remembered how we found ways to miss the bus, get sick.

My mother told me last night that I could sleep in her bedroom but I couldn't bring myself to. It's hard enough to be here without hearing Swede's whistling or feeling his quiet but unobtrusive power moving through the house. There's no hat hanging for him nor is there a pair of his boots sitting casually in the living room.

My mom and my sister Monica were up late making sandwiches for the lunch. It doesn't seem possible that only yesterday I was in San Francisco having an afternoon feast on top of the hot tub while strategizing with Mary Dunlap and friends about the immigration lawsuit.

Yet here I am in South Dakota. Last night we, the immediate family, sat in the room off to the side. The room with my grandfather in it. The casket closed. My frail grandmother was there. My uncle Billy. My aunt Angeline. My mom. My sister. My grandfather.

There was a grey cowboy hat so carefully placed on top. Flowers about the room. Hymns playing in the background. Why it was only 12 years ago that I was last in this funeral home but my grandfather was alive then. My grandfather was alive then. He was alive just a month ago.

The weekend before he died, I started to get very depressed. I felt that something was missing inside of me, something was being taken out of me, out of my soul. Something. By Monday night I told Linda that I felt something terrible was going to happen. I was in tears. This something. I don't trust my intuition.

I want the day to go fast and yet I don't want it to end. I feel smothered by the grey, the endless hills. These things that I sometimes long for in the city. No clamor, no noise, just the hills, the ravines. I want to beat this earth, this god-damn earth which will later slowly swallow him into it. Who digs those holes?

I always believed that my grandparents would never die. Sitting in the back seat of the car, I always thought this. I could never imagine the funeral. One time I told them they would see the world change, that it would end in their lifetime and that I would help make it happen but that they didn't have to worry because it would be wonderful. The world has changed alright. It's like one of those "Perils of Pauline" movies with the buzzsaw coming down just inches from ending the life underneath.

My mom said it would have been better if they both died at the same time. I understand what she means. She is not being callous. After all they were partners for almost 56 years.

I wondered at the funeral home, who would bury Mr. Kessling? He's buried so many of us. There were two white women at the rosary. Everyone there shook my hand, hugged me, told my mom I am pretty. Regine, Marie, Vivian, Agatha, Tweedles and others. All there, but a lot of them are gone too. It was comforting to see their faces again. I like to remember them the best years ago sitting outside the community center in the shade laughing with that endless teasing and joking.

Some of the rosary was in Lakota and then later they sang Amazing Grace. Somehow it felt out of place. There was no wake. I can see the years have changed us, maybe into dried corn. There are few old Indians left. So few. This is dangerous for me. It is dangerous.

Everything seems to take a long time but it always seemed that way when I lived here. My brother Lawrence is going to drive us to the funeral. His manner is somewhat like my Uncle Billy. It could almost be like a long time ago. I'm fantasizing, I'm dreaming. No, it's not Billy driving, No, it's not my grandfather sitting in the front. Come back to reality and don't break down. Don't even cry. Okay?

We're pretty quiet all the way to Mobridge where we pick up Lawrence's suit and get a quick breakfast. I wonder if we'll make it on time. My mother was always running late. But we can't be late.

I'm certain Father Augustine will be the priest even though my sister told me it is a different priest. Father Augustine has been gone as long as I have. The town seems so deserted and lonely. Wakpala. We drive past the trailer where I first came out and almost died because of it. I'm reliving everything of my life that I experienced here.

More people greet me and my family at the church. Some of them have not seen me since I was in braids. I see the hearse and get frantic. Where is the casket? Already inside. I did see my grandfather. My mom asked me if I wanted to see him. I didn't really want to. I've never seen the results of third degree burns but I had to see him again.

We go into the church. I go through the motions of Catholic routine. Bless yourself upon entering. Genuflect before sitting at the pew. I do this not really sure if Catholics still do that and not noticing if others are. The bell is struck. All rise—in this cold church. The altar has a chalice with Sioux designs. I liked the gold one better. The mass for the dead begins.

I'm between my grandmother and my mother. My aunt is crying quietly all the time. My grandmother finally realizes that I'm there beside her but I can't touch her. Finally I'm starting to cry. The priest speaks. We respond. All the words are in english. I remember the family joke about Grandma Hattie who went to confession in this church at easter time and it had been so long since she'd been that the mass was delayed, the confession line was still waiting and long, and finally she came out but was crawling. I remember bingo in the basement and how I was always being reprimanded by the sisters for saying yeah sister instead of yes sister.

And that the first writing piece I had done was about a midnight mass and my standing outside by myself in the quiet falling snow.

There's a part in the mass, as always, funeral or not, where the priest sermonizes. This part I've always hated. They talk about sinners and how bad we all are. I grit my teeth. And sure enough it is bad. It is worse than bad. He dares to call my grandfather by his first name. He says, "When the sisters and I were driving down here this morning, we were talking about Henry and what kind of man he was and I said to the sisters, you know whenever I think of Henry, I always think of his faith." I think bullshit, fuck you. Then he says, and the sisters agreed, that Henry had deep faith. I think he probably had deep faith that *you* would take and take. And I think just what the hell do you know what my grandfather thought or how he lived or how he loved or how on Saturday nights he drank a six pack of budweiser and talked about the old days when the first priest came and gave food to the Indians and how they all threw it down the hill after the priest left. He goes on about Henry. Henry. Henry. Henry this and Henry that. You take his name in vain.

The mass will be over very soon. It really will be final very soon. The cemetery is most certainly final. Up the hill to the cemetery. Park, get out. More words from the priest. There's my cousin Crackers. So much older looking. The air is still. The lowering has started. The creaking of the frame that holds the casket. Then someone begins singing a Lakota song for my grandpa whose name is Ogala Tanka, not Henry. The man who is singing says he is singing for Ogala Tanka. Then a wind starts, first it is a slow breeze and rises as the song does and ends as the song does. My grandfather is down there. Put the cover on. Thud, the first shovelful of dirt. Thud, thud, thud. Cry, cry, cry. My mom takes me to the burned house. Osinka.

Then the drive back. We take a slow turn. We go the long way toward the Rattlesnake Buttes, toward the Lonesome Buttes. My grandfather said once he saw a coyote on its way to the Lonesome Buttes and the coyote was singing Lakota songs and talking about something. And in between the buttes is where my grandparents lived before they moved into town. Where my mother grew up, where I grew up. The road to the place is grown over. My mom is starting to cry. We go on the long way road. We're crying. This has been in my dreams.

Close to Timberlake. I know my mom is thinking of Swede too. He died only a few months ago. She's lost her husband, her father in less than one year. I want to go to Swede's grave but I don't want to ask. She turns around and says do you want to go to Swede's grave. I nod yes.

The earth is still fresh. His grave has a small steel marker, listing his name, his date of birth, his date of death. Immediately next to his grave sits a large headstone. I stand and remember Swede. My mom is quiet. It feels like spring here. I half expect to hear meadowlarks and the sun to shine, soothing away the pain. Swede, my stepfather for 26 of my 29 years. I finally look at the headstone and it has my mother's name. Henrietta M. Lind, born July 31, 1938.

picture your mother as a revolutionary

Picture your mother as a revolutionary.
It sounds preposterous? Yet there are hints.
She was seen back then at this rally, at that demonstration,
talking history at factory gates.

Picture your mother in the milltown,
beating up fudgecake, thinking of suicide,
feeding stray cats on the back steps,
afraid to talk to the neighbors.

They say she'd been a labor activist,
but her union has disappeared
from most of the history books.
I think it merged with another one,
and the C.I.O. kicked it out.
I think my mother merged with another person,
self-exiled washed up on a different shore
where apartments are large and air-conditioned
and history is dangerous.

Now, she watches color television
and doesn't say much. But
sometimes a spark from the past
flares in a razor-edged phrase
nobody else can interpret.
They see an old woman.

I've heard she boldly left footprints
but the snows, of course, have melted.

I picture my mother as a revolutionary
as I walk another circle behind police barricades
demanding peace, jobs, abortions, day care, increased pay,
lowered rent, a settling of old scores.
I am a promiscuous radical,
trying to occupy the space
she once may have claimed.

enid dame

MARISELA LA GRAVE
PORTRAITS









from SING FOR THE DREAM BETH BRANT



Chapter One – 1968

SueLinn's mama was an Indian. She never knew which tribe, only that Dolores wore a beaded bracelet. Yellow, blue, and green beads woven into signs. Burnt out from alcohol and welfare, Dolores gave up one late afternoon, spoke to her daughter in a strange language, put the bracelet around her skinny girl's wrist, where it flopped over her hand. She turned her face to the wall and died. November 4, 1968.

SueLinn watched her mother die. Knowing by an instinct that it was better this way. Better for Dolores; but her child mind, her nine-year-old mind, had not yet thought of the possibilities or penalties that lie in wait for little colored girls with no mama. She thought of her friend, James William Newton, who lived across the hall. Went and got him. He walked SueLinn back to the room where her mother lay.

"Lord, lord, lord, lord," the old man chanted as he paid his respects, covering the still warm woman with the faded red spread. His tired eyes, weeping with moisture, looked down at the child standing close to him.

"Go get your things now, little gal. Bring everything you got. Your clothes, everything."

With his help, she removed all the traces of herself from the darkening apartment. James William made a last, quick search and told the child to say goodbye to her mama. He waited in the hall, his face wrinkled and yellow. His hand trembled as he reached into his pants pocket for the handkerchief, neatly folded. He shook the thin white cloth and brought it to his eyes where he wiped the cry, then blew his nose.

SueLinn stood beside the bed she and her mother had shared for as long as the girl could remember. She pulled the spread from her mother's face. She looked intensely at Dolores. Dolores' face was quieter, younger looking. Her nose was broad, yet delicate. Her eyes were still closed, the dark lashes like ink marks against her reddish, smooth cheek. SueLinn felt a choking moving from her stomach up through her heart, her lungs, her throat and mouth. With an intake of harsh breath, she took a lock of Dolores' black hair in her small fist. She held on, squeezing hard, as if to pull some last piece of life from her mama. Then she let go, turned and ran into the hall; ran into James William's protective arms where she heaved and choked.

Together, they opened his door, walked into the waiting room that was welcoming. African violets sat in a row along the window sill; their purple, white and blue flowers shaking with the force of the door being closed. SueLinn went to touch the fuzzy heart leaves wondering once again, what magic the old man carried in him to grow these queer, exotic plants in the middle of a tired, dirty street.

James William put aside the sack filled with SueLinn's few belongings, and told the child to sit in his chair while he went to call the ambulance.

"Don't answer the door. Don't make no sounds. Sit quiet, little gal, and I be back in a wink."

SueLinn sat on James William's favorite chair, a gold brocade throne, with arms that curved into wide, high wings. She stared at the window. She looked past the violets, past the ivy hanging from a pot attached to threads dangling fresh and alive in front of the glass. She looked onto the street, the avenue that held similar apartment buildings, large and grey. Some had windows knocked out, some had windows made bright by plastic flowers, some had windows decorated with crosses and "Jesus is my Rock" painted on from the inside. The Harbor Lights complex of the Salvation Army stood low and squat, the lights beginning to be turned on, bringing a softening sheen to the beige cement. The air was getting cold, as the people pulled their coats and jackets closer to their bodies and walked, hunched over in struggle past the Chinese restaurants, the grocery, the bars, the apartments. Cars made noises; the noises of rust, of exhaust pipes ready to fall off, the noises of horns applied with angry hands. Buses were unloading people, doors opening to expel faces and bodies of colors and shapes. The avenue seemed to go on forever in a road of cement, tall buildings, people, machines; eventually stopping downtown, caught up in a tangle of other avenues, streets, and boulevards. The child looked out the window, seeing and hearing none of this.

James William walked down the three flights of stairs to the pay phone in the lobby. He called the operator to report the dead woman, walked back up the three flights of stairs, his thoughts jumping and beating against his brain, as his heart lurched and skipped from the climb. Entering the room, the child turned to look at the man.

"They be here soon child. Now we not lettin' on you here with me. We be very quiet. We let them medical peoples take care of things. We don't say one word. Ummhmmmm, we don't say a word."

He came to the window and watched for the white ambulance that eventually came screaming to the curb. Two white men, their faces harried and nervous, got out of the ambulance and entered the building. A police car followed. The cops went inside the building where the manager was arguing with the medics.

"I don't know nothin' about a dead woman! Who called you? Who did you say she was?"

The officers hurried things along, the manager angrily getting out his keys.

"It's probably that Indian. She's all the time drinkin' and carryin' on. Her and that sneaky, slant-eyed kid. Who did you say called in? Nobody let on to me."

On the third floor; cops, medics, and manager formed a phalanx around the door to 3D. Knocking and getting no answer, they unlocked the door and went in. Up and down the hall, doors were opened in cracks. Eyes looked out, gathering information that would be hoarded and thought about, then forgotten.

"Anybody know this woman?" the cops shouted in the hall.

Doors closed. Silence answered. The officer pounded on a door. A very old woman opened it, a sliver of light behind her.

"Do you know this woman in 3D? When was the last time you saw her?"

Her dark brown face resettled its lines as she spoke.

"I don't know her. I hear she was a Injun lady. One a them Injuns from out west. I don' know nothin'."

The cop waved his hand in disgust. He and his partner started down the stairs, their heavy black shoes scratching the steps, the leather of their holsters squeaking as it rubbed against their guns.

James William stood, his ear pressed to the door panel. SueLinn continued to look past the glass. Eventually, sounds of feet moving away, sounds of hard breathing as the body of Dolores was carried down the three flights of stairs and out into the cold November twilight.

Children were massed on the sidewalks, faces sharp and excited. Mothers called to them, the air moving with words of Spanish, Chinese, other languages tumbling together to make one sound. Together, SueLinn and James William watched the white truck back up, turn around, and head for uptown and the morgue. The cops followed.

James William Newton was seventy years old. Singer of the blues, Prince of Georgia Blues, Sweet William; moved from the window, went to the kitchenette and put the kettle on to boil. He moved slowly to the icebox, then to the cupboard; taking out a pot and settling it on the hotplate. Everything surrounding James William was small and tiny like him. The table, covered in blue oilcloth, was just big enough for two. Little wood chairs were drawn tight up to the edge of the table, waiting for Sweet William's hands to arrange the seating. The one window in the kitchenette was hung with starched white curtains trimmed in royal-blue rick-rack. A single wall was papered in printed teapots and kettles, red and blue splashed on a yellow background. The wall was faded from age and sun, but still looked cheerful and surprising. A cupboard, painted white, held the thick dishes and the food. Rice, red beans, spices, cornmeal, flour, salt, honey, and sugar. A cardboard box placed on the yellow cracked linoleum, held potatoes and onions. The papery skins sometimes falling to the floor, coming to rest by the broom and dust pan leaning against the teapot wall.

On the first night of SueLinn's new life, she watched James William work in the kitchen, her eyes not moving from his round body as he walked the few steps across the linoleum, taking leaves out of a tin box, placing them in a brown pot, then pouring the whistling water over the tea. He replaced the lid on the pot, removed a tea cozy from a hook, and placed this over the teapot. The child, ever fascinated by Sweet William's routine, his fussy kitchen work, his hands dusting and straightening, felt comforted by the familiar activity. Often Sweet William made supper for the girl. Cooking up the rice, a towel wrapped around his fat waist, mashing the potatoes, adding canned milk and butter. Sometimes, there were pork hocks or chitlins. The hot pungent dishes would be magic, made from the air and a little salt.

James William sang quietly as he busied with the pot of soup. His eyes grabbed quick looks towards the chair and the thin brown child who watched him with blank eyes. Little folds of flesh covered her eyelids, which she rapidly opened and closed. Sitting like that, so still, her eyes blinking, blinking, the old man remembered a turtle he'd seen a long time ago, home in Georgia.

Poking around in the marsh, he and his friends had found a spotted turtle, upside-down, struggling to put itself right. He had picked the turtle up and looked at its head, pulling in, eyefolds closing over the eyes in panic, then opening, staring at him. He had set the turtle on its legs, where it continued on. The boys had watched and laughed at the creature's slow progress. James William remembered the turtle, remembered his friends; the sweetness of them. Memories like this came often in a haze. When the memories came, he clutched them to his mind, holding on to each minute of them; afraid to never see them again. He recalled the day. So hot and lush, you could hold the air in your hand and feel it wet on your skin. He recalled the smell of the swamp, like a green smell, a salty smell. He recalled the reeds pulled from the mud, stuck between their lips. The taste of bitter grass mingling with another taste of sweet, almost like the stick of licorice his daddy had brought him from town. He tried to recall his friends, their names, the colors of brown and tan, but the memory was going. Yet, he remembered the black skin of Isaac, his best friend of all. Remembered when Isaac held his arm, the thin fingers spread out looked like molasses spilled against his own yellowish, almost white-looking arm. Isaac?

Stirring the soup, he sang bits of song, culled from newer memories of the band, Big Bill and the Brown Boys. Tunes spun from his lips. Notes and chords played in his throat, starting somewhere in his mind, trickling down through his scratchy voice box, coming out to sound like the last moments of a highly tuned guitar; round, weeping, and full. Sweet William sang, his face shifting as he wove the music in and out of his body. His head moved and dipped, his shoulders jerked to emphasize a word, a phrase. To SueLinn, it was as pleasurable to watch Sweet William sing, as it was to listen to him. His words and music were almost always the same. Sad and lonely words, words that came from heartbreak, a home with no furniture.

"Lord, what I gonna do with this here child? Now listen up girl. You gonna be my little gal. We be mama and little gal. We be a family. Mmmhmm, anybody ask you, you be mine. It ain't gonna be easy. Old James William, he got to think of some heavy talkin' to fool the peoples that be snoopin' around here. Them social types, them government peoples. Yes mam, James William got to think of some serious talkin'. Lord! Old man like myself with a child. A baby! I tells you, you know I never be married. Leastwise, not no marriage like the government peoples thinks is right. Just me and Big Bill movin' with that band. Me bein' a fool many a time over some sweet boy that talk with lots of sugar and no sense. But that Big Bill, he were some man. Always take me back, like I never did no wrong. Yes child, I be a fool many a time. But I always got a little work. Workin' on them cars sometime. Child, I swear the metal in my blood! I can still hear that noise. Whooo! It like to kill me, that noise, them cars hurryin' along the line, waitin' for a screw here, a jab there. But I worked it! I worked it! And me and Big Bill, we make a home. Yes we did. We did. And before the high bloods and the sugar get him, we was a family, that fine man and me. Mmmhmmm. Look at her set there with them turtle eyes. She can't talk! Now listen here baby, you mama at rest now, bless her sorry little life. And you got you another kind a mama now. I take care of my baby. You mama so peaceful now. With the angels and the Indians. She make that transition over, mmmhmmm. She be happy. Now I gots to make this here turtle gal happy. You gots to cry sometime child.

Honey lamb, you gots to cry. If you don't grieve and wail, it get all caught up in you, start to twistin' your insides so bad. Girl! It hurt not to cry. You listen to this old man. Sweet William, he know what he talkin' bout."

*Precious lord, take my hand
Lead me to that promise land
In your kingdom grace is nigh
In your kingdom way on high.*

The man began his song in a whisper. As he ladled out the soup into bowls, he switched from hymn to blues, the two fitting together like verse and chorus. He nodded his head towards the child, inviting her to sing with him. SueLinn's thin high voice joined James William's deeper, fatter one. They sang together. They sang for Dolores, for Big Bill, for each other. The singer had taught her practically every song in his repertoire. Blues about unfaithful women, only Sweet William had changed the shes to hes. Blues about being Black, being out of pocket. Blues about home. And home was a hot, sweet, green and brown place, where a body grew corn and black-eyed peas. Home was a place where your mama was, waiting on a porch, or cooking up the greens. Home was where you were somebody. Your name was real, and the people knew your name, and called you by that name. It was when you got to the city, that your name became an invisible thing, next to the other names you were called. Familiar names, all the same. *Nigger, bitch, whore, shine, boy*. It was when you got to the city that you started to choke on your name and your breath. SueLinn often asked about home. And James William talked and talked.

*Precious lord take my hand
Lead me to that promised land
In your kingdom grace is nigh
In that kingdom way on high.*

The man came from the kitchen and picked the child up in his arms, set her on his lap in the brocade chair, covered them with his special afghan, and the two rocked and swayed.

"She like a bird, no weight on her at all. I *do* likes a rock in this old chair. It help a person to think and study on things what ails us. Yes mam, just a rockin' and a studyin' on those things."

SueLinn's tears began. She sobbed, the wails moving across the room, coming back as an echo. James William sang, crooned, wiped her eyes and his own with the dry palms of his hands.

"My baby. My turtle gal. Lord, I remember my own mama's passin'. It hurt so bad! She were a good woman, raisin' us ten kids. My daddy workin' his body to an early grave. It hurt when a mama die! Seem like they should always just go on bein' with us. Bein' our mama. Yellin' to be good, bein' proud when we deserves it. You mama, she try her best. She were a sad woman. She love you, little gal. And I loves you. We be a family now. Big Bill! You hear that?! A family! SueLinn Longhorse and James William Newton. Now ain't they gonna look twice at this here family? I swear. *I swear!* It be all right, my baby girl. It be all right."

SueLinn stopped crying as suddenly as she had started. Her face with its slanted eyes, small nose, full lips, subdued itself.

"But James William! I hear people talk about heaven. My mom didn't believe in it, but where will she go now? I don't know where she is! And sometimes . . . sometimes, she said she wished I was never born."

The girl stared into the old man's face, trusting him to give her the answers. Trusting him to let her know why she ached so much, why she always felt so alone and like a being who didn't belong on this earth.

His skin was smooth, except for the cracks around his eyes and down his cheeks, ending at the corners of his mouth. His eyes were brown and yellow, matching the color of his skin, like mottled corn, covered with hundreds of freckles. He had few teeth, except for a startlingly white stump here and there. When he opened his mouth to sing, it looked like stars on a black map. His lips were wide and soft and dark brown. His nose was flat, the nostrils deep.

"Baby, I don't know bout no heaven. My mama truly believed it. But I thinks this story bout pearly gates and all is just a trick. Seem like there ain't nothin' wrong with this here earth and bein' buried in it. You mama, her body soon gonna be in that earth. The dirt gonna cover her and that be all right with her. She miss the sky and the ground and the wind. Told me plenty a time. Seem like, compared to that heaven where the peoples hang playin' harps and talkin' sweet, that this here earth ain't so bad. You mama, she be mighty unhappy in a place where they ain't no party or good lovin' goin' on! Seem like that heaven talk is just a way to get the peoples satisfied with the misery they has to bear in this here world. Once you gets to thinkin' that a reward's waitin' on you for bein' poor and colored, why it just beat you down more. Mmmmmhmmm, them white peoples, they thinks of everything. But there's a lot they don't know. Everything don't always mean *every thing*! I do believe Dolores be more at rest in the brown dirt. And lord child, from jump every mama wish her children never be born sometime! That's a fact. Mmmmmhmmm. Honey, she love you. She just too full a pain to remember to *tell* you. It just like me and Big Bill. Why, they be days go by we forgets to say Big Bill, you my onliest one. James William, you sure one fine man. Then you gets to thinkin', hey, this man don't love me no more! And you gets afraid to ask, because you thinkin' that's his duty to remember. Then you gets mad and sad all together, and then you speakin' in shortness and evil kinda ways. You forgets that every body be carryin' his own pain and bad things. The disrememberin' be a thing that happen though. We be foolish, us peoples. Ain't no way gettin' round that! Seem like, if we be perfect, we be like them white peoples up there in that heaven they think so special! Whoooo child!"

And he laughed and laughed, hugging SueLinn tight, his chest rumbling in her ear. She laughed too, even though she wasn't sure she knew the joke. But it made her feel better, to be sitting in Sweet William's lap, her head pressed to his heart, the afghan of bright colors covering her coldness and fright. She had laughed with Dolores. Mostly over Dolores' mimicry of the people in the street, or in the bars. She almost turned into those people, so good was she at capturing a gesture, a speech pattern, a way of holding her body. There was no meanness in the foolery; just fun, just a laugh, a present for SueLinn.

"Now my turtle gal, this old colored man be talkin' more than his due. I says, after a song and a good cry, they ain't nothin' better than hot soup and peppermint tea. I thinks I even gots a little banana cake saved for you."

They unfolded themselves from the brocade chair, and went to the table. The tiny Black man with light skin. And the tiny girl of indeterminate race, her thin body wrapped in the afghan crocheted by Sweet William's hands. The colors moved across her back, the ends trailing on the floor. As Sweet William poured the tea, his white cotton shirt dazzled the girl's eyes. She watched his short legs walk slowly to the stove, his small feet wearing the felt slippers he never seemed to take off. He was wearing his favorite pants, grey wool with handsome pleats in the front and a small cuff at the bottom. And his favorite belt, a wide alligator strip weaving in and out of the grey wool belt loops. The buckle of the belt was solid silver, round and etched with the words *Florida Everglades*. It had been a gift from Big Bill, so many years ago, the date and reason for the gift was lost in James William's mind. He only remembered Big Bill's face as he handed the belt to Sweet William. The dark beige of his face flushing and reddening as he pushed the tissue-wrapped gift towards James William, saying, "Take this honey. For you."

The white cotton shirt that so dazzled SueLinn, had cuffs turned back, fastened with silver-colored links, a red stone gleaming in the center of each piece of metal.

Red. Red means stop. SueLinn had learned that in school when she had started kindergarten. That was four years ago. She was in third grade now, a big girl. She liked school. At least, she liked it when she went. When her mama, Dolores, remembered to send her. When SueLinn remembered to wash out her t-shirt so she could be clean. When she felt safe to ask her mom to braid her long hair without making the woman cry. When Dolores was in a good mood from having extra money, and bought SueLinn plaid dresses and white socks and shoes that were shiny and had buckles instead of laces. Dolores talked loud at these times; talked about how her baby was just like the rest of the kids, good as anybody, and anyway, she was the prettiest kid in school by far. SueLinn had a hard time understanding this talk. Everybody in school wore old clothes and shoes with laces. It didn't make sense. Maybe it had to do with the picture magazines that showed up around the apartment. The people on the shiny pages were always white, and stood in funny poses. They wore fancy clothes and coats made from animals. They looked like they were playing statues, which SueLinn had played once with the kids at school. It was a scary feeling to stop and stand so still until the boss kid said you could move. She liked it though. It made her feel invisible. If she was really a statue, she'd be made out of stone or wood, or something hard.

SueLinn was not a statue, but bony and covered with soft brown skin and coarse black hair that reached beyond her shoulderblades. She practiced statues at home, standing on the worn green couch, trying to see herself in the wavy mirror on the opposite wall.

"Getting stuck on yourself, honey? That's how I started. A grain of salt. That's what we should take ourselves with. A grain of salt. We're just bones and skin, honey. Bones and skin."

The child thought her mother much more than bones, skin, and salt. She thought Dolores was beautiful and was proud to walk with her on the avenue. The day they got the food stamps was one of the best days. Dolores was sober on those days. She sat at the card table, making lists and menus. Dolores labored hard on those days. Looking through her magazines, cutting out recipes for "tasty, nutritional meals within your budget." SueLinn stayed close to her mother on those days, fascinated with Dolores' activity.

"How would you like chicken vegetable casserole on Monday? Then on Tuesday we could have Hawaiian chicken. I found a recipe for peanut butter cookies. Would you like Dolores to make you cookies, baby? Maybe we could make them together."

SueLinn shook her head yes, and stood even closer to Dolores. Shiny paper with bright colors of food lay emblazoned on the table. SueLinn was caught by Dolores' words. Her magic talk of casseroles and cookies. Writing down words that came back as food.

Food was something real, yet mysterious. Food was something there never was enough of. And she knew there were people in the world who always had enough to eat; who could even choose the food they ate, who went into stores and restaurants and read the labels and the columns, and maybe glanced at prices, but often paid no attention to such details. SueLinn didn't know how she knew this was so, but she knew all the same.

Food stamp day. Dolores making something out of nothing. What did it mean? The combination of these things; the food, the recipes, the store, Dolores, Miss Terrell. It was like a poem SueLinn had to learn in school. The poem was kind of like where they lived, about cities and kids. It was a song-poem, like the Chinese woman next door talked. It was like James William and the way he sang. It was like Dolores when she talked in a funny language. It was all those people put together talking and singing. Everything meant something. This she had learned on her own; from the streets, from the people who surrounded her, from being a kid. SueLinn wanted to ask Dolores about it, but was too shy.

Dolores was almost ready. SueLinn pattered at the card table, stalling for time, prolonging the intimacy with her mother. SueLinn was not ready for the store. It happened every time. Dolores got sad. The store defeated her. It was a battle to see how far down the aisles she could get without giving up. The limp vegetables, the greenish-brown meat, the lack of anything resembling the good food in the magazines. SueLinn sensed it before it came. The faint shrug of Dolores' shoulders, the shake of her head, as if clearing it from a fog or a dream. Then they proceeded fast, Dolores grabbing at things that were cheap and filling, if only for a few hours. The little girl tried calling her mama's attention to funny people in the store, or some fancy-packaged box of air and starch. Anything, please, please, that would take that look off of Dolores' face. That look of fury and contempt. That look of losing. They would end up coming home with a few things like bread and canned corn and maybe hamburger. Sometimes, cereal in a box and a bottle of milk. Dolores would put the pitiful groceries away, go out and not return until the next day.

Dolores picked up her lists and stamps, placed them in her purse, a beige plastic bag with her initials stamped in gold lettering. D. L. Dolores Longhorse. She went to the wavy mirror, and with her little finger, applied blue eye-shadow, because, "you never know who we'll meet." Brushed her black hair until it crackled and snapped with sparks and life across her wide back. Dressed in blue jeans too tight, a pink sweater frayed and unraveling at the bottom, her gold-tone earrings swinging and dancing, she defied anyone or anything to say she didn't exist.

"Let's go."

Her daughter took her hand and stared up at Dolores. As if to burn the image of her mother into her brain, to keep the smell of lily-of-the-valley cologne in her nose. The brown ovals ringed in blue looked down at her child. Dark eye caught dark eye. Two females locked in an embrace of color, blood, and bewildering love. Dolores broke the intensity of the moment, cast her eyes around the apartment, committing to memory what she had to come back to, tightened her hold on SueLinn's hand, and said, once again, "Let's go." She set the lock and the two went out into the street.

SueLinn's eyes closed with the last memory of her mother. Her head nodded above the soup. James William got up from the table and pulled the bed down from the wall. Straightening the covers and fluffing the pillows, he made it ready for the child's tired body. He picked her up and carried her the few feet to the bed. Taking off her shoes, he gently situated the girl under the covers, and tucked the pillow under her head. He placed the afghan at the foot of the bed, folded and neat.

James William Newton went to his chair and sat in the nighttime light. He could see a piece of the moon through a crack between the two buildings across the street.

"Ole moon, what you think? I got this here child now. Them government peoples be wantin' to know where this child be. Or is they? Seem like the whereabouts of a little gal ain't gonna concern too many of them. I ain't worryin' bout raisin' this turtle gal. It one a them things I be prepared to do. Moon, we gots to have a plan. I an old man. This here baby needs me, and there gots to be some providin' to do. Big Bill? Is you laughin' at me? It be a fix we in. Big Bill? I needs a little a them words you always so ready with. Honey, it ever be a wonder how a man could talk so much and *still* make sense like you done. I sittin' here waitin' on you. Yes sir, I sittin' and waitin' on you."

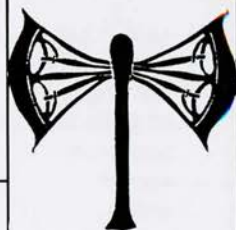
He sat through the night. His memories came and went, like the peppermint tea he drank, refilling his cup many times. At 4 o'clock, he drank his last cup, rinsed it and set it upside-down in the sink. He settled his body on the davenport, the afghan pulled up to his shoulders. He looked one more time at the girl, her black hair half hiding her face in sleep.

"Child, sleep on and dream. James William, he here. You be all right. Yes, you be all right."

He closed his eyes and slept.

Bio-Spiritual Narrative

DAVINE



Xangô
she said

closing my mouth
tightly
i thought
that figures

maybe i said it
out
loud
not meaning any disrespect
of course
in the face of
greatness

Xangô King/God of Thunder
consumed by
his own passion
consumed by flames

the Priestess awaited
a joyous
a grateful
response
finally
aren't you happy
mi hija?
many people want Xangô
to be their
Orixa

all i could think about was
the power
the power of passion
the danger

I

Dazed Ambivalence
for a gift
somehow
exhilarating
yet frightening
in its magnitude
knowledge
without
Awareness
can
make us
fools

i tread carefully
caress the confirmation
roll it gently
in my mind
a tiny egg
in my palm
precious
life
am i to give birth
a new me

no new way of walking
no change in tone of voice
the Birth
is in understanding
something
behind
the mechanics
of Being
However
Embodiment
of Ancestral energy
Direction
in the face of all this
i am
so small

said "that figures"
because of
the Intensity
of Mars God of War
Scorpion
Xangô
energy
said "that figures"
because
the low
burning
the internal burning
has many times
almost made
me
an ancestor

II

when does one come
into one's own
who protected
guided
me as a child
quiet
pensive
preoccupied
watching
aching
to be
unobtrusive
hating
the color
red
regretting:
glorious mane
gapped teeth which they said
meant honey between my
space-at-the-top big legs
all pronouncing me
public property
male consideration
no one designed wallpaper
that looked like me
i dressed
down
sat with my back
in corners
frowned/sucked teeth/smoldered

when did
Xangô spirit energy
come into me
at birth
somebody
had a lid on my
power
womanchild
too small
to wield force
in pastel pink
resenting
the color
red
so free
fear/denial
red is not
soft
ladylike
in pastel pink
everybody had a lid on my
passion

III

Reflections:
The problem with Passion
is that it knows
no bounds
logic is inconsequential
absurd
you cannot say
you are too short
to be so passionate
you are too thin
to be so passionate
too young
too old
too light complexioned
yet
absurdities abound
Passion is not
meant to be contained
just expressed
maybe transformed
and expressed
but Expressed

IV

remembering
 ages removed
 sound of thunder
 southern summer evenings
 the family drawn together
 lights out
 we huddle in
 A Silence of Fear
 waiting for
 God's anger to
 pass

Thunder
 rolling clapping
 inside me
 i frighten myself
 sit in darkness
 wondering if it is
 perverse
 to enjoy the
 sound of thunder
 could it be
 a
 God's joyous
 laughter
 Xangô

V

the awakening
 the reckoning
 began with a darkness
 distant rumblings
 the color of
 a rich wine
 gathering momentum
 increased in tempo
 to the color
 of
 Blood
 Anger
 Fever
 Life
 Love
 Passion Roaring Thunderous

One day
 suns and moons
 past
 i looked up
 my face to my face
 saw my lips
 loud
 in red lipstick
 gesture of boldness
 Take That
 no mistaking
 the meaning
 the fullness
 the arrogance
 the provocation
 the challenge
 these lips
 red hot
 angry red
 Black red
 i remember
 i searched far and wide
 for red lipstick
 no one wore it anymore
 certainly not black Ladies
 red amplifies Black fullness
 i used to
 hate the color
 red
 So Black
 Finally coming into my own
 i searched for
 the color of
 my mother's brazen lips
 coming into
 Our own

one day
 suns and moons
 ago
 i looked up
 saw myself
 decked
 head to toe
 red
 Strong Shameless
 saving myself
 and feeling
 fine
 Xangô!

VI

Sometimes
 i see me
 kicking out walls
 feel my pulse
 quicken to the
 visions of violence
 that in me
 is possible
 Breathe it out walk it through
 simmer down
 some measure
 self-control
 Xangô

I am your daughter!
 i want to
 learn from your life
 i want not to
 go up
 a puff of smoke

you do not
 smolder
 you are ablaze
 the burning
 your mouth
 a furnace
 opens
 tongue flaming
 singes
 my eyelashes
 my underlying heat
 flashing through eyes
 your heat right on top
 you're too hot
 to handle

facing an adversary
 i calculate
 lie in wait
 you head them off
 at the pass
 i say
 ahha

VII

ten years later
 enter Robyn
 here is someone
 i say
 this is Brash Rash
 Bold Aggressive Formidable
 Somebody
 Awed
 by your dynamism
 i step back
 for a
 closer look

feel
 the Intensity
 of Mars God of War
 Aries
 energy
 but you
 hate the
 color
 red

impetuous youth

i say
 the difference between
 moon in scorpio
 and moon in aries

i say
 i am mellowed by time

i say

i wish i didn't have to
 wait for anger to Be
 Xangô

VIII

Day of your departure:
 in remembrance of me
 you have the crown of your
 hat
 crocheted with
 wine thread
 you call it
 red

Day of your departure:
we wield the double-headed axe
the symbol of Xangô

your friend Linda
comes by
says:
there's something she wanted to tell you
a spiritual advisor
told her you have Xangô energy

i say to myself
that figures
Xangô energy or—
she can't remember
or whose
i, hurriedly helpful
say
she hates the color red
Xangô's color
maybe she's Oxun
she loves yellow
to myself i say
plus Oxun is the
second wife of Xangô
that makes sense

you say
Davine's Xangô

Linda says
you know you're so bossy!
you say
humph! Davine's bossy
meanwhile
i am still wondering how you can
hate the color
red
Linda pensive
remembering
says
yes
he says the women who have Xangô's
energy
are here to take a stand . .
to protect the more
submissive sisters

i say uh huh
maybe that explains it
when does one come into one's own

i thought i took a stand for
myself for us all
because of my mother's life
my mother and all the sister women
i've seen abused
i've seen take a stand
and take what comes with that
i thought my
experience as a child
an ember
burst into woman flame
refusing for us all
the continuance of a life
not of our own
choosing
when did i come
into my own
maybe not as the pained adolescent
but bursting
through the birth canal
from the beginning
not yet experienced
i came prepared
to wield the
double-headed axe of my ancestral spirit guide
wherever heads were hard enough to need it
i had to force the lid off
my fire

i say uh huh that explains it

in my head i say
me and Robyn
we been directing
ourselves
in the wrong direction

it's all right
with me
if
we defy the laws of nature
but
like is not supposed to
attract

yang and yang
we bang
our heads
together

missing the point
we rub
each other

two sticks
two stones
a spark
a flicker
a flame
ABLAZE

Sister!

we could have
burned each other
out

we have so many more
things to do

but meanwhile

just to be honest

you might as well
wear red

Dedicated to Robyn Royál for having
provided the impetus for this exploration
With Love,
Davine



from ANOTHER MOTHER JUDY TONGUE GRAHN



When I was twenty years old, in 1960, I was rudely arrested in the armed service, confined, searched, interrogated without a lawyer, phone call, or friend for days by raincoat-clad investigators who played “good cop and bad cop” and frightened me into signing a “confession” of “sexual acts” (and thoughts and feelings) done with other women. I was told there was no use trying to fight the charges. My mail was read. Women who expressed too much warmth toward me were investigated. Everyone who knew me in the service was threatened with the same fate unless they stayed completely away from me and out of touch with me. And they did.

Confined to the barracks for three months while the investigation and subsequent undesirable discharge were prepared, I was virtually in solitary confinement—although surrounded by people. Two thousand miles away, my lover Yvonne was also investigated and was nearly denied her teaching credentials, just as she was only weeks away from graduating. She stayed out of contact with me for two years, for fear that association with me would ruin her career.

But late one night weeks into my isolation in the barracks as I stood ironing my military uniform, by myself as usual in the basement, a woman, another enlistee, appeared and dared to speak to me. She kept in the shadows so I wouldn’t recognize her, though I still remember smooth black hair and a white scared face. She whispered, rapidly and with no indication that she was going to deliver an important message, so that I almost missed what she was saying. “We think you’re very brave,” she said, “to speak up. A bunch of us are with you. But we’re afraid to show it. I just wanted you to know. Don’t give up.” She was shaking. She touched my arm and then vanished quickly up the dark stairs. I lowered my head over the ironing board and wept.

1961, Making a Spear of My Own

My parents were sent a letter describing my “crime,” and my father, who had been a close friend to me in adolescence, withdrew from me for many years. Although my mother remained warm to me, her devastation plagued her for a

decade. She carried the burden of incomprehension and social ostracism alone, having no one with whom to discuss this unspeakable subject, whose very books of indictment were locked from us ordinary citizens.

Discharged into a poor area of Washington, D.C., with \$80 and utter demoralization, I worked as a bar maid serving hard liquor to dying winos. I did not believe there was any farther to go on the bottom of society than where I was. But as I found the company of other Gay ex-service people who also had the state fall on their heads, living in an area mixed with people at the bottom of Washington's perpetual ghetto of Blacks and whites and a scattering of Asians, I found that despair has no bottom; it can multiply itself indefinitely, inside the mind and outside.

I took a night job as a sandwich maker and went to laboratory technician school during the days, even though I hated hospital work. But I had to put the pieces of my life back together somehow. The state had declared its hatred of me and my friends and family—with one or two exceptions—declared their fear, contempt, and disgust.

For more than two years, while other idealists of my generation joined the Peace Corps, I thrashed about at the bottom of the well of degradation among the more demoralized of America's people. Then I spent years emerging, fighting, studying, making notes on my own about Gay people I knew. I joined the Mattachine Society to picket in a slender line for Gay rights at the White House in 1963, and by then Yvonne had come back to me and marched too. *Life* magazine printed pictures of Gay men and women who looked like me and quoted a cop saying we were germs.

Using a pseudonym (Carol Silver?), I wrote a pro-homosexual article for *Sexology Magazine* in 1964, the first I had seen in print in any magazine except our own *Lesbian Ladder*. I met Barbara Gittings and she came from Philadelphia to talk to us. She was editor of the virtually underground Lesbian magazine. She spent an afternoon trying to persuade me to take over the editorship of the magazine. But I didn't have confidence in my abilities; I didn't know my knowledge was real, that I was an expert on the subject of Lesbianism, by virtue of experience, courage, writing skill, and brains. I did not know that organizing autonomously for their rights and history and cultural traditions and rightful place in society is *all* that people ever have, that this is the weapon, territory, nation, power. All the rest is despair, the whining of dogs who cannot speak, except to beg for bones.

The *Ladder* of Barbara Gittings passed into the hands of Barbara Grier, who changed its formal, legalistic format to a more popular Lesbian culture vessel. I became a poet and a leftist, going to San Francisco with Wendy Cadden. In 1969-1970 we formed a separatist Lesbian/feminist organization and then a woman's press, The Women's Press Collective, which published mostly Lesbian work for eight years until its merger with another Lesbian publisher, Diana Press. Beleaguered with difficulties and having taken some unpopular political stances, Diana Press crashed in a hail of attack, physical and psychological and economic; the group of us were not functional as publishers after 1978.

Meantime other independent Lesbian presses had grown up. In 1964 I had begun doing research on the nature of Gay people in society. I had taken notes on

Lesbian couples I knew, then I had to destroy my notes when I heard through the underground grapevine that such material was illegal and was being confiscated by government agents in New York City.

In 1974 I took up the research task again, not stopping this time until I had finished a book, this book. This book is a spear from my good right arm, fiery arrow from my well-earned bow, and shield, and horse, and tent, and blanket, and comrade in this hard war. This book I have lived with longer than I have with some of my lovers and I have known it longer than some of my friends; this book is my flaming sister-in-arms. May she flame for centuries.

All Who Gather Around a Fire

. . . All who gather around a fire are the tribe, and fire, in its most basic sense, is the generating flame of the female. In the prototypical tribe, women and men live in separate communes, and lead entirely different lives. Male/female connection is as brother/sister through the female line; grandmother and aunts wield tremendous authority; sisters give their brothers power over and responsibility toward their children in an avuncular—uncle-based—system. Fatherhood is irrelevant; men care for the children of their sisters in their tribe. Children's sexual feelings are acknowledged. People have sexual relations with members of both sexes. Ceremonies and sacred events may include sex magic or rite, the nature and gender of which depends on the intended effect and its place in the ceremony.

An all-encompassing net of tribal psychic mind, rather than "blood," unites a clan's people. The immediate maternal line is extended almost indefinitely by a clan system that unites huge numbers of people as "relatives," "cousins"—not by genetic inheritance but by clan identification and adoption. Some American Indian tribes used so much adoption to gain members that, for example, at one time the Cherokee were one-third white and Black and only two-thirds indigenous Indian, and the Iroquois of the early seventeenth century were largely made up of Algonquin adoptees.

These tribal people, related by and unified by tribal consciousness, participated in a psychic tribal mind rather than a genetic blood inheritance line or a patriarchal legal entity. They literally did not need to invent the telephone to communicate long distance. Their auras and other psychic structures were connected, and they were careful to keep competition and violent dissension organized in ritual ways so as not to break the valuable supersensory perceptions among themselves. The medicine people, many times Gay as a matter of course, were especially skilled at psychic phenomena of all kinds, including the ability to use psychic power to effect as well as affect physical matter, shape-shift, make things appear, travel physically long distances by instantly transporting their bodies, bringing souls back from the dead, making brooms dance, and so on. But everyone, shaman or not, participates in the overall psychic mind of the tribe. And although psychic abilities have been very consciously suppressed in modern nontribal society, remnants peer through the surface, usually recognized as telepathy, telekinesis, intuition, "heightened awareness," or, barely acknowledged and as yet thinly developed, psychic power.

Since becoming lovers with half-breed Indian and psychic, Paula Gunn Allen, I am astonished at the clarity of "message" we can transmit to one another from distances of six hundred miles, three thousand miles, or through a wall. They are simple messages so far: "I love you," "I'm in trouble and afraid," "I'm lonely and sad," or "Come to the next room and sit with me." But they come through with a tremendous force, utterly compelling and unmistakable. My anxious need to talk to Paula on the phone from five hundred miles away in a crisis once sent her flying out of a café, dinner left unfinished, to rush home blocks away, arriving breathless to lift the ringing phone and find me, in a panic, on the other end. Likewise, when her need to hear from me is acute, no other thought can enter my mind but to call her. I once believed only mothers, and only a few of them, felt such things, and only toward their children. Not, surely, Lesbian lovers of totally different backgrounds who have known each other only a few weeks. "You're surrounded by spirits," Paula says. "The room fills with them wherever you go, spirits of all sizes and descriptions." She kisses me. "That's 'cause you're an elfkin," she says. And that's what she means.

My own psychic abilities have caused me no end of trouble in this ultrarationalistic, linear-cause-and-effect society, and I have developed an elaborate protective system, as many people have, for covering up, denying, and lying about the tons of information that I just "know." When I was a teenager I remember hearing voices so acutely that I would stop on the street to look around, trying to see who was talking. I did not understand my voices until I was in my mid-thirties when a series of major events told me where they come from.

One summer I drove with my then lover Wendy to New Mexico to visit my first lover, Yvonne, for two weeks:

It was August, magnificently beautiful, with the huge sky filling with immense thunderheads and rainbows. I had left you eight years before, Von, and our lives had diverged. I had become a successful poet, a publisher and editor, and a Lesbian activist. You had gotten a Ph.D. in education and developed an idealistic program for teaching ideas and methods of independent thinking to American schoolchildren, even in the deteriorating urban schools. Although in my sharp-tongued manner I didn't let you know, I admired you, my brainy Von, tremendously, and you seemed on the verge of stepping into the world of influence and leadership.

On the last day of our visit, you threw an I-Ching, something I had never seen you do before. But we were all changing, leaving the logical positivism and economic materialist theories in favor of more subjective divinatory sciences. The predictions you read were glowing for me and for Wendy, and for your current lover. But for yourself, the coins spoke of sorrow, pain, loss, death. I thought this meant your young lover would leave you, and I was sorry.

In a torrent of New Mexico summer rain, Wendy and I drove away from the North New Mexico town, and through the water drops I waved good-bye to you, running through the rain in your jacket, looking more like the beautiful dike I had once eloped with in a funny red dress than the salt-and-pepper Ph.D. who was about to embark on an illustrious administrative career in the urban school systems.

as the bond between women is beginning
in the middle at the end
my first beloved, present friend
if i could die like the next rain
i'd call you by your mountain name
and rain on you

—Funeral poem

That night Wendy and I parked our van near Ship Rock, where hours later the howling wind woke me and I sobbed with a grief I could not understand.

Back in my room in Oakland that October I wrote the beginning of a novel, a novel that unaccountably centered around a dead woman. I often worked until dawn and increasingly heard voices in my ear, especially just after I lay down to sleep. I was worried, too, for your lover called to tell me you were in the hospital in Albuquerque with a mysterious problem in your leg—a minor clot, your voice later reassured me on the telephone. All that month I wrote at night, and when I stopped to rest, voices rang in my ear, calling my name so that I turned my head to answer “What?” out loud.

Once I heard a man's voice amplified as though by a loudspeaker. Another time I was suddenly hearing a playground filled with children's voices playing and yelling. I listened to it for perhaps five minutes, and I could not understand where it was coming from; I even leaned out my Oakland window into the silent night in case someone's radio was playing schoolyard sounds. I seemed to have become a receiver for bizarre and urgent messages, and as fall deepened toward Thanksgiving of 1974, they blathered on in my ear nearly every night.

All that month you stayed in the hospital, insisting when I called that it was all nothing. “I'm going to come to California, to see you guys,” you said one day. “I can't wait to see you,” I said. The next day your lover called. “You had better come,” she said, “a clot has gone to Von's brain, leaving her unconscious.” Dazed, I stared out of the window of the airplane departing for Albuquerque at a brilliant blood-red and storm-black sunset. “She's dead,” I thought, and it was true.

I could still feel your spirit near you as I bent over your wasted, bony frame, with wired connections to green-lit machines. An hour later I felt the spirit had said good-bye. We, your three lovers and your parents, sat up all night in a hopeless, necessary vigil.

When I went back to Oakland I found the night voices had completely stopped. “I wonder if they came from Von,” I thought. But I had no way to prove it. I wrote a funeral poem to help myself comprehend your death.

life, as it stands so still along your fingers
beats in my hands, the hands i will, believing
that you have become she, who is not, any longer
somewhere in particular

we are together in your stillness
you have wished us a bonded life

love of my love, i am your breast
arm of my arm, i am your strength
breath of my breath, i am your foot
thigh of my thigh, back of my back
eye of my eye, beat of my beat
kind of my kind, i am your best

—*Funeral poem*

My life did not go well for many years following Yvonne's death. But at least I was beginning to make sense out of the voices in my head. One night at 4 A.M. I heard my name said very distinctly, and this time I recognized the voice as that of a friend who is a performer with a very distinctive manner of speaking. There was no mistaking who it was. I thought of calling her to ask if she needed something, then suddenly the door to my room opened and she stumbled in. She was drunk, and lonely, wanting company; she had driven across town in a needy stupor to see me. As she pulled back my covers and lurched into bed beside me, I grinned in elation and years' worth of relief. My voices were real! They had sources! I wasn't crazy or troubled with ear problems, I just sometimes heard what certain other people in my life were thinking when they directed their thoughts toward me. I had a piece of tribal mind.

now you have left, you can wander
will you tell whoever could listen
tell all the voices who speak to younger women
tell all the voices who speak to us when we need it
that the love between women is a circle
and is not finished

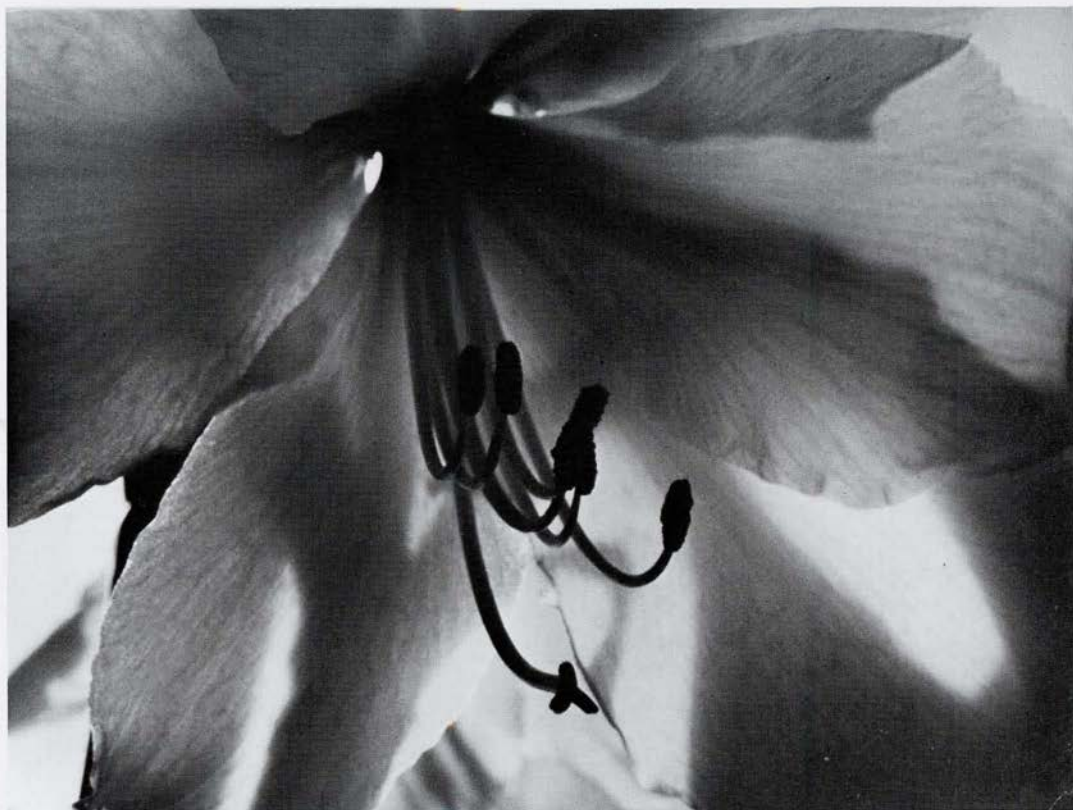
wherever I go to, you will arrive
whatever you have been, i will come back to
wherever i leave off, you will inherit
whatever we resurrect, we shall have it
we shall have it, we have right

and you have left, what is left

—*Funeral Poem*

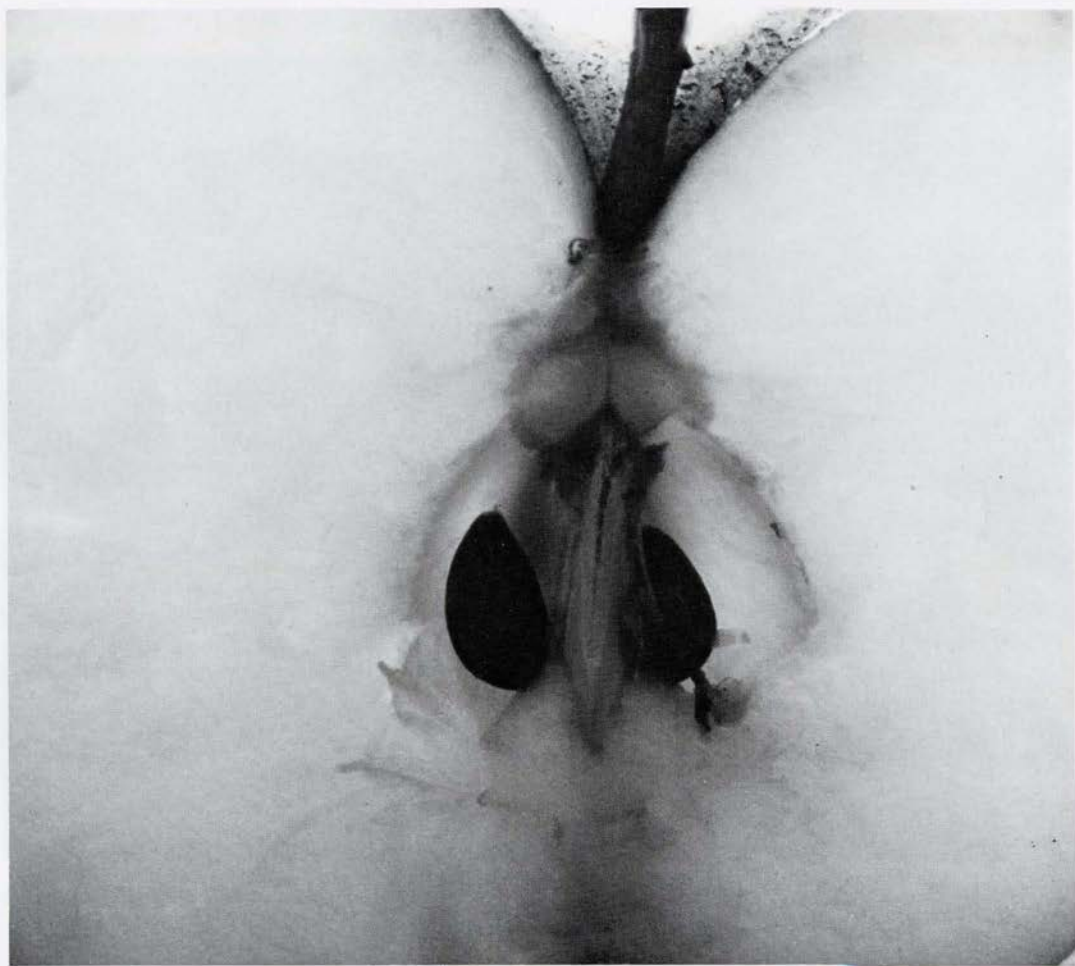
These passages are excerpts from Chapter 7, "Riding with the Amazons" and Chapter 9, "Friction Among Women" from Another Mother Tongue: Gay Words, Gay Worlds. Beacon Press: Boston. 1984

Excerpts from "A Funeral: Plainsong from a Younger Woman to an Older Woman" are used throughout Chapter 9. It was first published in She Who by Judy Grahn and is included in The Work of a Common Woman, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978, 1980.

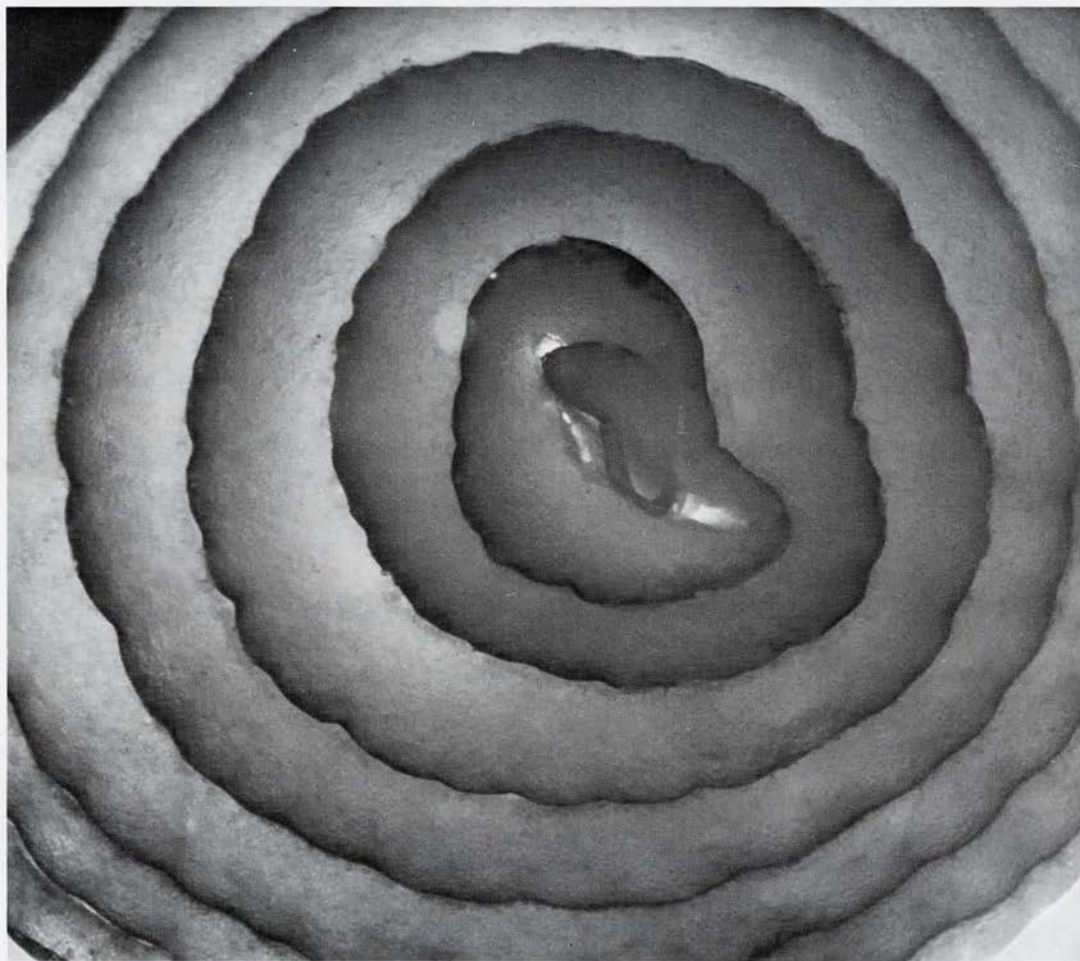


Heart of Amaryllis blossom

EDNA BENNETT STILL-LIFES



Apple Interior



Red Onion Slice

REQUITED LOVE

NANCY DEAN

The two women left their apartment together, each reviewing the day's tasks. Reggie had a flyer to get out and the new logo to work on before she saw the new client in the afternoon. She turned her key in the lock as Ann toted down the overnight garbage. After doing the Ricardi D and C Ann would go to her own doctor for her check-up and then dash to Harkness to see her mother. As usual Reggie was peppy and full of advice in the mornings, "Now you be sure to ask your baby doc about zinc and vitamin A, since most of you properly trained types don't know the difference between a vitamin and an enzyme."

"Reg, for God's sake, I just wondered if I needed some zinc."

"If they trained you right, you wouldn't have to ask *your* doctor!"

"OK, got a token? I have extra. So, you'll be back at six to feed the animals and I'll meet you at the Greek place for dinner at 6:45 before the play, OK?"

They talked as they took the elevator down and Ann disposed of the green plastic bag, fitting details of their private lives into parts of moments together. Reggie would pick up milk and animal food on the way home, and tomorrow Ann would do their laundry. Some days they were glad for a broken faucet, because it gave them an excuse to talk together.

They walked rapidly to the subway entrance, feeling bits of grit whirled against their cheeks by a chill November wind.

"You be sure to give my love to your Ma, whether she'll accept it or not. Enjoy the day," Reggie said, as she always did, her curly red hair in the morning looking as if her head was shooting sparks.

Reggie went to her print shop in that creaky building where she was robbed the day, years ago, when she and Ann decided to live together. She had been robbed at least four times since, but so had most people who stayed on in the area. Now she had a powerful watchdog, more insurance, a better alarm system, but still no gun. She refused to buy one, though Ann wanted her to and to do target practice.

"Some doctor's advice," was all Reggie would say to that. "I'll gamble on staying alive and not being responsible for some poor creep's death for drug money. George will do his best for me." George was the German Shepherd that rested at her feet in her office and followed her about from task to task, just to be sure she did them right.

As Ann rode in the elevator up to her mother's floor she mused about her own doctor, the young woman Reggie called "Baby Doc." She was a very conservative woman, probably straight, but very comforting in her punctiliousness. Because they were rushed, she had insisted that Ann come back for a review of her tests.

"Baby Doc" had told her that her mother's broken hip was probably the result of her lessening ability to absorb calcium. Her mother would probably scoff, but at the moment Ann was in command and would insist that she took calcium and magnesium daily and whatever would spark her ability to metabolize them. In her briefcase she had a batch of vitamins and mineral supplements for her mother jostling the book cover.

Doctor Mary barely looked up as her daughter entered her hospital room. She knew thoroughly enough the consequences for a woman of seventy-eight who fell and broke her hip. If she were lucky the hip could be pinned and she could get around on a walker for the weeks of healing. If she were not, she would have to lie there for weeks, while nurses came in periodically to turn her over. It would be painful when they did their work, and if they did not, she would probably get pneumonia: her lungs would fill up and she would die. If she made it and did get home, pinned—she chuckled grimly thinking what "being pinned" meant when she was a girl—then she would have the pleasure of living with a walker until she could advance to a cane. She would have to get up in the night and clunk her way to the toilet. She would knock her way around her house, taking fifteen minutes to make it up the stairs. Probably she would have to hire someone to live in the house with her as a daytime nurse, unless Ann would stay until she healed. Her smile when she saw her daughter was bleak.

Ann came into her room with a jaunty step and some red carnations sticking out of her brief case, "So how's the patient?" She leaned over her mother and kissed her on the cheek, noticing how chill the fine skin felt. She walked to the window, touching the radiator, "Cool in here?" She found a light blanket in the closet and as she placed it over her mother's bed clothes she looked to see if she had eaten. "Pretty rotten being a patient, dear, but" as she pulled up a chair, "this won't be forever."

"Easy for you to say, my girl." The blue eyes were dry and angry. It was obviously not the best moment for a sales pitch on calcium, but Ann had to try. She had just an hour to see her mother, get some lunch and get downtown to Fourth Street to the clinic.

Like most physicians, her mother was a terrible patient. How had illness presumed to strike her? Never ill, she supposed illness was essentially a failure of the will. A broken hip, caused by a fall, was even worse than disease because it surely could have been avoided, and her mother loathed unnecessary disasters. She expected her mother to find fault with the floor, or her shoes, or the polish on both, for causing her fall. She expected her to complain about the nurses, about the food, but she was lying there, too still.

"So . . . today we find out if you can be pinned or not? Good. The sooner the better."

The pale lids closed and the grey head turned away. "When the bones go, it's just a question of when I'll fall again. You know that, Ann."

Ann knew that some thought old people fell because their bones broke, not that they broke them in falling.

"Mother, you would never let a patient of yours say something like that." Whether or not her mother would listen, Ann didn't know, but by the time she

had finished, her mother was weakly consenting to take the vitamin and mineral supplements that she placed in the drawer of her bedside table.

"Ann, it's too late." She waved a hand in dismissal. "It's a toboggan ride from now on. Straight down."

"Mother, if that hip can be pinned, you can be up and out of here in a few days. If it can't, we have a tough time, true, but four weeks or even six, isn't forever. We'll bring you books, and your needlepoint. Friends will drop in. I'll see you daily. You could even start working out that article you have been talking about." She worked to pour energy into the cool hand she held.

"A pep talk." The grey-blue lips tried to smile. "Sweet. I'm just tired."

"Sweet, isn't your word, Mother. You *must* be tired."

Her mother gave a low chuckle. She patted her hand. "Now, some good news. What are you up to?"

Ann started to tell her mother about the Molinari baby when Doctor Johannson's large hand swept aside the bedside curtain.

"How are we doing, Doctor Mary? Tell your kid she can go, so that you and I can have some time together, all right?" Looking down over his pouter pigeon chest, he gave Ann a lordly wink, "I'll talk to you later on the phone, Darlin', all right?"

Glad enough to be dismissed, Ann left, able to be on time for her own patients. Through the day she was conscious of anxiety about her mother's depression. For her mother fear was a failure of nerve. "From now on it's straight down." Hadn't she said that? Death was rarely discussed in her house, although both her parents and her uncle had been physicians. Like sailors refusing to admit they could drown, they fought fiercely for life for their patients, and when they lost – silence. Her father would say, "Poor bastard." Her mother's face would be inscrutable. Even her "Tell me some good news," was an admission.

Ann shook her head and wished she could talk to Reggie about it. But she went in to Genevive her assistant, a younger woman who would be with her full-time when Doctor Mary retired. Genny had fought so hard for third world lesbians at her college that she almost wasn't accepted into Med school, but she graduated top of her class, a first rate internist to whom a patient felt she could say anything. As an opening gambit she never asked, "Are you satisfied with your contraceptive?" Lesbian patients relaxed and dropped their prepared lies for the questions she never asked.

Genevive wanted to confer with her about a patient who was in again with ulcers and what looked like symptoms of some muscular degeneration. In Genevive's office Ann listened and stared at the books on the shelf.

"You got worries, Chile?" Genevive said, slipping into the language they talked to get close to one another.

"I got worries, Gen." Ann felt her eyes filling. She put out her arm to Genevive's shoulder and suddenly hugged her. Gen held her close a second and then pushed her back to look at her. Ann's eyes were brimming over.

Ann made it through the day, but two calls came through, one to say her own doctor wanted to see her the next day at two, and a call to Doctor Johannson

that informed her that pinning wasn't possible, that her mother probably would have to go into traction. When she saw her mother the next day she was shocked at her pallor. She seemed to have sunk into a semi-coma. True, the trauma of her fall had been genuine. She had slipped in her cellar and had lain there on the cement floor until her household worker had come the next morning, but hadn't the effects of that passed? Ann slipped the new mystery novel she had brought onto the bedside table and her mother's dark eyelashes fluttered open.

"Good to see, my girl," her mother said faintly as Ann kissed her. Ann said that she brought greetings from Reggie, George at the Print Shop, Baby Molinari, Genevive and herself, a whole crowd standing beside her. Her mother's smile slipped like a shadow across her mouth. "You've heard my news?"

She took her mother's hand and laid her cheek against it. Her mother's grey head moved in a negative, back and forth across the pillow. A tear slipped free of the blueish eyelid.

Ann's right hand moved through the light hair. "I have a surprise for you . . . one I know you've hoped for for some time." Her mother's slender eyebrow went up. Ann looked to catch a sharp gleam in the weary eyes. Nothing pleased her mother more than hearing news of some success that her husband or her daughter had brought her—a phrase or an event to be held up and burnished like a trophy. She had told Ann of all those physicians who made signal successes writing—from Conan Doyle and William Carlos Williams to Michael Chrichton. Why didn't Ann try to write? People would love to read about just the episodes Ann told her over dinner. And didn't Ann always want to write? And why didn't she get started? By the time one decided it was always late, wasn't it?

Ann dredged into her over-stretched briefcase and pulled out a book jacket. "I just have this with me, just to show you that finally we did it!"

Her mother almost lifted herself up onto her side, but a crick of pain caught her. "You what? What is that?"

"Something called, pretentiously, *Shades of Light* by my pseudonym."

"Another name?" Questioning eyes.

"Oh, patients . . . privacy."

Her mother sighed. She breathed deeply. "Suddenly I'm tired, dear. I will sleep, I think." She patted Ann's hand softly and let her head fall into the pillow as her eyes shut.

As she walked into the Baby Doc's office, Ann wondered how her own secretary had shoe-horned this two o'clock appointment for her. She must have moved some of Ann's patients' appointments, but she wouldn't do that without asking . . . Her doctor's face was kind—very kind. She asked when Ann last had had a check-up.

"About four or five years. Well, I've been very busy."

"Not too busy, Doctor, to notice your own symptoms. You have been working for at least six weeks with a fever, right? High at times, dropping to sub-normal at times?"

And then it came. Did she smoke? Had she noticed unusual bleeding? faintness? fatigue? and so forth. The tests suggested possible cancer of the kidney with perhaps metastases elsewhere. She would go into the hospital immediately

for tests with a possible operation next week. If they could get it out with one kidney, they would be fortunate. The young doctor was tough. She was angered by Ann's negligence and was not hiding it.

Ann worked from three straight through until eight that night. She encouraged her secretary to put in extra people, handled emergencies with dispatch, reviewed the case she would be operating on in the morning, had her secretary call Reggie to tell her not to wait dinner, cancelled appointments after noon the next day for four days and shifted them to Genevive wherever possible. She kept piling on the work to avoid going home, but suddenly at 8:15 she wanted desperately to go home and see Reggie.

"Hel-lo stranger! Are you exhausted?" Reggie called to her as she got out of the elevator, the apartment casting a mellow light into the quivering white fluorescence of the hall. She dropped her briefcase as soon as she closed the door behind her and held Reggie tightly in her arms. She was home. Reggie's lilting voice began saying all the usual domestic things about the weather, dinner, who had called, a crazy thing that had happened at the shop, what George had done to an intruder.

Ann felt as though she were seeing through everything to something else. She was translating into her new language now; the dailyness meant the precious. She wanted to push some tape machine back to when mundane details had been just banalities, just details of daily living, not something so precious she wanted to snatch them up and hold them. She wanted to know everything Reggie had eaten for dinner, where she had sat, what George had done to whom, when and how. She was gobbling up details of their daily lives like food.

Then, to keep from telling Reggie about the "baby doc," she told her that she had spoken to Doctor Mary about the book.

"You what? I can't believe you did such a thing!" Reggie's hand brushed through her hair, leaving it standing up in shock.

"Reggie, she was so down. I just had to give her something good to hope for, if I had it."

Reggie could see a chain like lights strung along a highway consequence linked to consequence. A book kept secret for ten years . . .

"But she thinks it's recent. It's what she's wanted for so long."

Reggie's voice was wry. "Not exactly, dear."

But Ann was definite. She hadn't given her mother the actual book. It wasn't even in print any more. She'd never see it, and the main thing had been accomplished—to give her mother that zing of pleasure, of hope—to counteract the depression that pulled at her.

Reggie just shook her head. Unlike Ann, she had come out to her own mother and father, had been thrown out of the house, "disowned" as her father intoned in a voice out of Deuteronomy—and it had been entirely worth it. But Doctor Mary was a hard woman. Their lives were intertwined financially as well as personally. Still Reggie hadn't cared. Let the chips fall, she said. But they hadn't.

Finally, when Ann had eaten and they were settled beside each other on the sofa having tea, Ann told Reggie the results of her tests. Reggie sat absolutely

still watching Ann's face, those planes and shadows moving as she spoke the language of nightmare. Everyone, it seemed, was living now in some part of this bleached landscape where blood and bone seemed to be silently corroding, eaten by chemicals they ate or drank or breathed. They had heard of one friend after the other battling disease while regulations were being removed so that more and more untested chemicals could be fed into earth, soil, and blood, making the very chain of life lethal.

At first Reggie denied it. Was Ann sure? Were the tests accurate? Maybe her tests had been mixed with someone else's. Then she became angry. How and why had this happened? Who lived more carefully than Ann? Who helped others more than Ann? Then she fell silent, looking at the floor. What would this mean for them? Now that they were finally together, after all the fear and the foolish delay—they had had only a few years—it seemed just a long week-end. Now was it all to go? She began to stride around the apartment to the wall and back, to the wall and back, thinking of ways out, people who knew of nutrition, holistic healing, a clinic in the Bahamas, in Mexico.

"Darling," Ann said softly. "Go slowly now."

They sat beside one another, holding one another, first Reggie drew Ann onto her lap and then in their soft talking Ann ended holding Reggie on hers. Then they were lying beside one another on the couch, talking and holding one another, looking ahead, far ahead, down the hollowed caverns of desert and shadowed green places. First would come the tests, then probably an operation, then . . . they would know . . . something.

As a doctor herself Ann hadn't had time to follow down all those new methods being developed, an unfortunate admission she knew, but the truth. She would have to read what she could and ask Reggie to help her. They would have to supplement the treatment that the establishment doctors gave her; she knew that, and her own doctor would help. When Ann's patients went into the hospital to be treated by others, she tried to build them up first with vitamins because conventional hospital treatment gave them only intravenous glucose and water after an operation. Now she'd have to do the same for herself. Reggie reminded her of the woman's health network, of Emily and Rachel, old friends now devoted to holistic healing. They had fought down cancer themselves and now met in regular sessions to help women like themselves, but Ann wanted to await the tests' results. There would be time. She would contact them then.

They left it at that, and next afternoon, after a very busy morning dealing with some of Doctor Mary's patients and some of her own, Ann went to Lincoln Hospital where in a half an hour she was divested of her clothes and professional self and reduced to the vulnerability of an angel robe and paper slippers. She lay between chilly hospital sheets waiting to hear the clink of bottles and tubes on a metal cart rolling toward her. She thought that every doctor should go through something like this every five years, just to keep compassion fresh. She thought of the Resident she had heard saying to his patient after childbirth, "Epiesiotomy—of course—much cleaner. But we'll sew you up tighter than a virgin afterward—don't let him worry." She thanked god that her trouble wasn't in Obs or Gyn. And then she heard the bottles rattling together as the cart rolled up to her bedside.

Her mother hardly opened her eyes as Ann walked briskly into her room four days later. The tests had confirmed what they had suspected and Tuesday morning would be the operation. She had urged Reggie to stay tough, not to get weepy or sympathetic, please, and now she determined, as she looked at her mother's exhausted face, not to tell her about any of it. There would be time. Her mother had enough to cope with. She wasn't in traction yet, but surely was dreading it.

"Oh, but you haven't heard. Of course, you wouldn't; you haven't been around – so much for your promises – they decided that they are going to be able to pin me after all. What a treat!"

"Wonderful! When was that decided?" As she learned the details of the hip break in relation to the pinning procedure she watched her mother's face. There was color in her cheeks, but her breath was short, and she spoke with a hard edge.

"I couldn't have had better news," Ann said, reaching out to stroke her mother's hair off her forehead.

Her mother turned away. "You left me anything but good news. You left me with the *jolly* news about your book – but no book. I suppose you presumed I'd never see it. Well, I told a nurse about it, asked her if it was in the hospital library. Was it ever! Well-thumbed – particularly the sex scenes."

Ann sat back quickly, withdrawing her hand. She tried to joke that it wasn't that bad, was it, a first novel, after all. Her mother's face twisted in disgust. She could hardly bring herself to ask how Ann might know of "such a subject," how she could think of writing about it. Her voice rose then stopped suddenly as her thin arms pushed her out of the pillows tugging her slim back.

"Oh my God, I see, I see." In her last hours she was being manipulated to feel pride in a book she had never seen. Her daughter had thought she was going to die.

"You wanted me to feel what? Proud of you?"

Her mother's face was streaked in paths of redness and pallor, the downward lines pulling at her trembling mouth as she asked Ann not to visit her again.

Ann half-stammered her apologies, trying to say what her intentions had been. And then Ann heard her mother as if for the first time. Had that ring, that echo always been there?

"Indeed, my girl, that you would represent yourself as an author in what you thought were my dying hours . . . of something so base . . ."

The word lesbian had not been mentioned. Her mother stared at her in silence and then turned away.

The scene Ann had feared since she was twenty was taking place. Her mother served Nature and the God of Nature. What did not serve procreative Nature must be depraved. This daughter, imbued with the same reverence, had to wrestle with the angel until it yielded up its name – self-loathing or self-recognition. And all that period, all Ann's deceptions, her evasions, her promises by touch and glance, if not words, her deeds of omission and commission – even living apart from Reggie for so long – all had been to avoid disappointing and

being rejected by this old woman. The wires of their old loves—mother and daughter—were twisted about their necks.

“Do what you like then. I don’t want to hear about it—or your writing—efforts.” Her contempt was palpable. One could cut it and eat it like a pear.

“The book is ten years old.”

“How could you tell me that now? I simply cannot believe that you are the daughter I knew.”

Ann looked down. If the many images of herself were set beside one another could they be fused into one image like focusing a camera? A lesbian, a doctor, a daughter, a truth-teller, a liar. Could she tug them into one clear image to live with? She had burnished one image: “Ann Perfect Doctor” and another “Ann Perfect Daughter”—all perfect because a central fact was missing. And now it was all out of control, a savage disappointment to inflict on a sick woman.

Ann’s voice was low. “I am still your daughter.”

“Why should you wish to be? You have your own friends. Go to them. Reggie . . . I never liked Reggie.”

Her mother had never liked the women who had been her lovers. Bland friendships she could tolerate. But not that secret intensity. *Shades of Light*, a poor first novel, maybe, but comfort to many who needed it. Maybe she would try another one. She almost grinned. In her illness and her convalescence she would write a tolerant, accepting, capacious book—a *Middlemarch* for lesbians.

Ann watched the pale woman under the fluorescent lights. She spoke very slowly, trying to send her voice back over the years. “Wasn’t it—in one of those wild—normal—mixtures of love, always lesbian?—Our love, I mean. You are shocked. It was unfulfilled.” Ann’s laughter rippled over her mother’s shrill protest. “Although requited!”

“You strike at me as I lie dying!”

“We are all dying, Mother. We should just face it more often.”

Ann turned, left the room and walked down the corridor, through the steady white lights of the cool hospital halls, down in the silent elevator and out into the cold air. The issues had never been clearer. She would have her operation. They would learn what they learned. She would go into chemotherapy, maybe cobalt treatment, with their nausea, faintness, hair loss. She would continue her practice as long as she could. She and Reggie would share all they could together. For the first time they would have both Thanksgiving and Christmas together, every holiday . . . maybe for a year, maybe longer. They would go off if they wished, if her practice and Reggie’s work permitted—no—anyway they would go off together as a couple.

She was contemptible, base, degenerate . . . what were the other words? Sick as Doctor Mary was, her hatred was still intact. Maybe that had always been the source of her vitality. So be it. Ann knew that she would probably step into the dark before her mother did. Her mother would live on, first with the walker, then with a cane, her distinguished air, and her virtue. In the slanting light of the winter afternoon Ann looked at her watch. She had to hurry to keep her appointment with a patient.

TALKING IT OUT

NELLIE WONG

Sometimes I wonder what poetry means
how it grips me a claw digging into my skin
how it dangles a golden dragon
around my neck
and I wonder why I sit in this hot July sun
perspiring and reading
Contemporary Greek Women Poets
and why my heart aches
at the loss of not talking it out
and why my mind springs a slingshot
back to yesterday eating tacos, beans and rice
in the heart of the Mission
how one woman's lack of confidence
prevented a whole from forming
how I reacted crawling from one ladder to another
in the web of my being
in the depth of falling off
the stand I thought I had made
in the rush of identification.
Right now a sister is dying of leukemia
right now a sister waits
for her sister to die
and my teeth ache
from the dentist's cleansing
from his remark
that blacks are taking over Oakland
that the Chinese if given the opportunity
could build their town west
to Washington and Broadway
and I could only nod
not in agreement
but with my mouth wide open
while he drills up and down
the teeth of my consciousness
my enforced gaggles
while my anger builds
into a mountain.
For the dentist it is the blacks
against the yellows
and the dentist is one of 'my people'
'my people' the phrase deludes me.

Talking it out
let the steam rise
from the backs of our throats
let the muscles take precedence
over the mind that controls
let a sister's thoughts be heard
let her hear the other's words
let her decide how she can fight
if we don't agree
what is law, what is right, and what is passion.
Why must I fly crying "caw, caw, caw"
through the skies
get tangled in the webs of Spiga
in The Son of Godzilla on midnight TV
why can't I freeze one icecube
and leave it alone
instead of connecting connecting
the threads of oppression and victimization
when I know that an individual must
and can control herself
from shooting her husband down
in front of a bank
for his taking more than half
of an income tax check
for dumping bills on the street
as if she were a whore
as if she were nothing more
than an ant
crawling in the cracks of the street.
And the justification for an act of violence
for the straw that
breaks
a woman's back
for the agony of suffering
year after year
of being beaten in the mind
of being beaten on the body
for the lack of power
to say she leans on no man.
Who am I but a poet
who is challenged on KPFA

to answer a man's question
why Asian women are married to white men?
And trapped like Baby Godzilla in Spiga's web
I coil, I hiss
at the danger
because my husband is white
because many Asian women are married to white men
and the statistics are posted and used
against us because we sleep with men not of our color
because we bear no children of true Asian blood

and I want to shout
that if I had a choice
I would have married any man
yellow, black, white or brown
any man
as long as he "saved" me from a life
of spinsterhood
as long as some man
gave me an identity
from being a woman
cut in half.

If I could dance and shout
the freedom I know now
the freedom I have now
to fight the contradictions
I could have told that man
that the question was irrelevant
to my talk on KPFA
that my personal situation
was not up for grabs
that the war between the sexes
belongs to all of us
and not between two voices
that speak on the airwaves.

If I could say to him and to you
I am fighting for my whole birth crisis
away from the rhetoric
of wellworn words that singe
a hot iron burning
the fabrics of truths
the right to choice.
Let me know the specific point
the minute detail
everything
the movement of a hand

to blanket the snow on a page
the movement of a hand
that raises life to a wholeness of love
not greed not corruption
not the perversion of fear.
And it was a sister-poet's line
that loving all loving is good
that fear is the only perversion.
Let the issues of race
be connected to the issues of sex
to the issues of class
and let the accusations stream forth
from a cornucopia for the fruit that spills
is the life of our struggles.
Don't let me float in a plastic balloon
and desert this earth
don't let me rusticate
a vegetable with no brains
I am kidding no one
least of all this laughable fool
who calls herself a poet, a speaker, a hero
that I will learn to live
to stand up for the poets and for the silenced
and dream of talking it out, talking it all out
for the fighters that swim in the crevices
of my body, for the women who fight back
for the dreams that flash like ribbons of fire
over the waves that wash over the lichen erupting my mind
and bursting my heart.

RED JOURNEYS

I dream red dreams, an oasis of fire and light.
Big Grandmother calls my mother on the phone
and I answer: "Ma, ah Ai Poo wah, she wants
to talk to you," and I filter away, my legs wobble
at the onslaught of tiny white matchbox cars.
Zoom zoom zoom zoom!
Is it a river carrying me away?
Is it the moon who says "no?" Is it my resistance
my giving into a body writhing in the deep, dark night?
Ai Poo and Ma are talking now to each other.
They sing and gossip and share pigs' tail soup, but wait!
Ai Poo has given up meat. Ma never has.

Ma loved to cook and gather us together
continuing what Bah Bah did, continuing
the tradition of feasting on poor man's food,
ricecrusts crackling in hot, boiled water.
My nose tickles. The white metal cars.
They attack my fingers, my dancing feet.
Do they dare to act, powerful as firecrackers?
Do they dare to think, live their own lives?
Are they ghosts wandering in search of bodies,
seeking longevity noodles? Birthdays, whole chickens poached
for the birth of sons, red egg and ginger parties,
ceremonies for shaving a baby's head. Birthdays.
And for girls? And for me?
Oh, Ma. Oh, Ai Poo.
Are you listening to this daughter's tongue?
Are you singing as you have sung, earthmiles away?
And what is filial piety to mothers and grandmothers,
the greatgrandmothers I've never known?
Unbandage these eyes, unbind these feet.
Tell me: what threads memory, dream, myth, reality?

Red quince blooms. Oranges and salted fish.
Good luck words ring in my ears.
My walls are Indy orange, red flowers sprout in paper cut-outs,
a fireplace I dare not burn. Framed in mother-of-pearl,
a kingfisher dives for pollens from spring buds
embroidered in strands of silk. And, Ma, your passport
photographs you, young and expectant, as you must be now.
It's true that girls stay with their mothers forever.
It's true that you wept when you left your own mother
and then she fell in Ai Leong while you sailed
across oceans to your new life in America.
Would Poo Poo have loved me and my sisters?
Would she have spoiled us, spanked us?
I put my hands in hers, stroll along paths of flowering peach,
stop with her at a pond and watch the goldfish play
and yet we rise and walk again, step by step, through
atriums and rice fields under the burning sun.
We stop again, refresh our tongues with tangerines
and she would begin to tell me about you as a girl,
how you worked as a bride to please your mother-in-law.
Your hands, these twin knuckles, crack
from the coming spring.

Nellie Wong



IT'S IN THE BLOOD

*We never asked to be mysterious.
We never asked to be inscrutable.
Still untold stories, untold histories.
Still the unknown unknown.
Retrieve burnt letters, receipts, bills,
anything written, anything spoken?
Our dreams in bones and ashes?
To be seen and heard.
To be known but not merely by our many names.
Being presumptuous I speak for myself.
Others who remain silent own their own tongues.*

Li Hong's ma ma died when Li Hong was an infant.
Ma said that Li Hong's ma ma was a little crazy.
The villagers said so. Li Hong likes to eat chicken feet.
Li Hong smiles, a childwoman.
Li Hong loves babies.
Li Hong is my sister.

Li Keng remembers Angel Island, the bright lights
of Oakland and San Francisco.
She said that Bah Bah sent fruit and candy
to cheer them up behind bars.
They were lucky, imprisoned
on Angel Island only four days.
The other immigrants waved goodbye,
some etched poems into the walls.
Li Keng learned to eat cheese and tomatoes
on the President Hoover.
To this day Li Keng cannot stomach butter or milk.
Li Keng is my sister.

Lai Wah remembers the ship. She was three years old.
The immigration officer asked her: What is your name?
Lai Wah answered: If you don't tell me yours,
I won't tell you mine.
Lai Wah smiled behind straight bangs.
Lai Wah remembers nothing of her years in China.
Lai Wah is my sister.

Seow Hong Gee is my father.
Suey Ting Yee Gee is my mother.
From 1933 to 1965 Suey Ting Gee was known as Theo Quee Gee,

a sister's name, a sister's paper that Bah Bah bought
to bring his wife and daughters over.
Theo Quee Gee was supposed to be my father's sister,
my sisters' aunt.
This was 1933. In 1924 the law said that Chinese men
could bring no wives to the United States.
Theo Quee Gee was unmarried, but we knew better.

Nellie Wong is my name. I was never Nellie Gee,
but we knew better.
When my sisters' aunt, that is, Theo Quee Gee, my mother,
got pregnant, to bear a child out of wedlock
was out of the question.
So Theo Quee Gee got married, by faking
a marriage certificate, by *marrying* a man
named Sheng Wong who agreed to appear
on paper to be my father.
Shame to the outside world avoided.
Secrets depending on which side of the fence.
When I was five and entered Chinese school,
Lai Oy became my Chinese name.

Leslie Wong was born after me.
Ai yah, another girl! That was my mother's wail.
Ma and Bah Bah named Leslie Li Ying.
Leslie was nicknamed Thlom Gawk Ngon.
Three-corner eye.
Leslie Wong is my sister.

Florence Wong was born after Leslie.
Ai yah, another girl! That was my mother's wail.
So no more Li's, so no more daughters
with Chinese names beginning with Li,
beginning with *Beautiful*.
So Florence was named Ling Oy to change my mother's luck.
Florence Wong is my sister.

William Wong was born after Florence.
Finally a boy! That was Ma's and Bah Bah's joy.
Thankful their daughter, Ling Oy,
brought them their son.
Bah Bah gave a month-old party
to shave William's head.
Eggs were dyed red, friends and relatives filled the house.
We drank chicken whiskey, gnawed vinegar pigs' feet.
Ling Oy was the magic that Ma and Bah Bah decided.
To beget (a son), to beget (a son) to love
and the heavens answered.

Wah Keung is William Wong's Chinese name.
William Wong is my brother.

I was never sure who I really was.
My school records showed that I was Nellie Wong,
that my father and Leslie's father
and Florence's father and William's father
was a man named Sheng Wong.
We told no lies, only the truth
as we were forced to.

My three older sisters were supposed to be my cousins.
My father was supposed to be my uncle.
My mother was supposed to be my father's sister.
When Theo Quee Gee *confessed* her illegal status,
she became Suey Ting Gee, Seow Hong Gee's legal wife.
But it was too late. Bah Bah died in 1961.

Now I use the name Nellie Wong.
Now I search for all the names that gave me life.

*Note: The spelling of the women's Chinese name, Li, is also spelled Lai.
It means beautiful. It's pronounced "lie."*

*Portions of this poem were broadcast in the documentary film,
"Mitsuye and Nellie, Asian American Poets," produced by
Allie Light and Irving Saraf in 1981. This poem in its
entirety has never been published.*



MARGARET RANDALL

WOMEN & PHOTOGRAPHY:

Why & How I Make Pictures

I

I am a woman.

Following some thirty years of my own silence, ignorance of our history, groping, exceptionality, and painful conformities, I became aware—through the burgeoning women's movement of the late sixties—of the voice/image . . . and then of the connections. For myself, and for others. Of myself and of others.

These exciting bits and pieces—an article or essay here, an image or vision there—became, for me, recognition of my own reality. And recognition led me to curiosity, research, a reorganization of my life and thought. I collected a variety of diverse (often contradictory) writings by women of the U.S. women's movement, preceded them with an introduction for Latin American women (I was living in Mexico at the time), and they were published in a small book which has gone into a dozen printings.¹

Then I began to concentrate on listening.

The voices of the prophets, the artists, the analysts, excited and propelled me. But the voices that moved me most were those of ordinary women, the Mexican Indian women whose babies I was then delivering (I was a midwife in Mexico City's misery belt), the women members of industrial or farming cooperatives under the illusions of Velasco Alvarado's Peru, women in Cuba who had helped make a socialist revolution and were beginning to understand how that great social, economic and political transformation affected their lives as women (what freedom came with that; what still had to be struggled for), and—later—the women of Nicaragua, whose particular history as well as what by that time had become a powerful international movement for women's liberation, informed their capacity to share to an inordinate degree the destruction of an old order and the creation of a new order in their lives and land.

I listened to these women. I asked myself how I might share what I was hearing with the world. Oral history, or testimony as it is most often called in Latin America, is a relatively new field. It is nurtured by history and by literature. And it nurtures both these disciplines. I don't believe it is coincidental that testimony as a genre has paralleled the birth and consolidation of the first successful people's revolutions in Latin America. People searching for their roots, people eager to understand their identity free from oppressive distortion,

people free to examine—and make—their own culture: these are all important requisites to a changing consciousness. I was certainly not the first to understand the importance of ordinary people speaking out of their life experience, and within that, women's voice. But I knew and worked with many of the first, and was fortunate to be able to work out of a context in which much questioning and defining took place.

II

At some point in all this, I began to make pictures. I became involved in photography. At first, perhaps, out of some desire to “complete” my journalistic skills. Or the skills of an oral historian. (I must confess to not having known that term existed until, in 1976, I was visited in Cuba by a Mexican oral historian who first put me in touch with that discipline which already possessed its initiators, methodologies, texts, congresses and catalogues!)

I was a North American woman, a poet for whom language is extraordinarily important, listening, working and writing in a language not really my own. I had been born in English. I was surrounded by, and finally functioning in, Spanish. In spite of having arrived at a proficiency and fluency that allowed for writing directly in my acquired tongue, there was always some deep inaccessible space, a zone I could not enter. I have often thought that the frustration born of this disparity might also have had something to do with the passion with which I suddenly “found” and assumed photography relatively late in life (I was 42 when I began to make pictures.)

What began as simply another skill, an element which would compliment the writing, quickly became a consuming need, an expressive form as important in my life as the use of words. And, as all forms of creative expression contain a unique language of their own, whatever role my linguistic frustration may have played in my original attraction to photography, it soon occupied its own place in my life: separate though connected, entire within itself, a way of seeing—and knowing.

III

I was recently in New York City, and I took some of my work to a prestigious gallery, one that also prides itself on a certain “openness” regarding so-called documentary photography. I was fortunate to have a friend whose influence assured my work would be seen by someone in a position of importance—or seen at all. The experience of showing my pictures to this person was educational, and I confess—coming, as I was, almost directly from the very different context of Latin America (in this case, Nicaragua), I wasn't able to really understand what had taken place until I left the gallery and discussed it with a friend (herself a New York photographer).

I produced my pictures. The person who looked at them acted as if she were doing me a favor. She attended to a number of other things and engaged in several conversations as she thumbed through the work. I was showing her

images from Nicaragua. I couldn't really tell how they affected her, except that they didn't seem to be affecting her very much. Then I showed her a few pictures from Canada. They were almost an afterthought (I have a very limited number of pictures from that country, and don't consider that they constitute a statement of any weight.) For the first time, she had words of encouragement, even some limited enthusiasm.

She explained that the Canadian pictures reflected *my* eye. "One *expects* that kind of image (she was pointing to the Nicaraguan pictures) to come from a place like that." She was referring to Nicaragua, the war, the fact that there is misery, change, fear, resistance, courage, defiance, even heroism; and that all those qualities could be seen in the pictures. What she was really telling me, I realized much later, was that this was not the proper subject matter for "real" photography, or "art." This was documentary photography, or journalism. My Canadian pictures were more authentically "me" because they were more "personal." Then and there I realized I no longer believed documentary photography a category of its own. Photography is photography.

IV

I started making pictures in Cuba. I had bought my first camera, a Pentax K-1000 with a 50mm lens,² on a 1978 lecture tour of the United States. I had a little more money than usual as a result of that tour; I wanted to buy, and bring back with me to the island a few things which might be useful in my work—mainly as a journalist. As I said before, the idea of owning and someday using a camera, mostly just had to do with improving or completing my writing skills.

The camera sat in a drawer for almost six months. Taking it out one day and beginning to use it still seem like magical events in my memory. There was no particular "reason." But if the incentives are shrouded in mystery, subsequent moments are brilliantly clear. I began shooting like crazy. I apprenticed to one of Cuba's best photographers,³ and was fortunate in choosing someone as powerful and visionary as he was articulate—with the lens and in the darkroom. I can remember many times going out in the street with my camera but without film—there was none!—and trying to understand achievements and mistakes without the final evidence to corroborate either.

Cuba, with its unique light and tough U.S.-imposed blockade, was an elemental place in which to learn photography. Cuban photographers had long since forgotten what it was like to be able to buy paper, chemicals or other photographic materials in a store. They became chemists, and made their own chemicals. Generous friends from other countries brought paper which was shared. Tourists were encouraged to leave unused film. By the time I became involved in making pictures, the Cuban Union of Artists and Writers (UNEAC) had established a photography section. The Wednesday afternoon meetings, in which one of us brought a body of work to be viewed and criticized by the others, were an invaluable part of my learning process.

My "baptism of fire," as they say there, was an invitation to Nicaragua to do a book on women in the recently victorious struggle (by that time it was August, 1979). I had already traded the 50mm. lens for a 35mm—which was to become

"my" lens. I had begun to conquer my natural timidity and learn how to walk right up to someone and snap the shutter (sometimes). I had worked hard on initial projects: series of images or photographic essays. I photographed the popular portrait photographers in the public squares, the old doors of Havana, an abandoned half-sunk ship off the island's coast, Colón Cemetery. And I stood for hours, silently, next to my teacher in our tiny shared darkroom space, watching his every move with negative, paper and chemicals. (I would become his shadow; later, in Nicaragua, I taught myself how to keep what was valuable to me of his teaching, and reject that which I didn't need or want, replacing it with my own vision.)

With the invitation to Nicaragua, I had my first opportunity to integrate the photography with what I'd been doing for years: listening to women speak, drawing them out, projecting my own sense on those voices, and retransmitting them. This time I wanted the voices to have an image. It was a simple concept, much less involved or complex than the word/image combinations I've approached since. The women, their struggle in words and pictures, that's all.

But did I know enough to carry it off? I wasn't a very proficient printer then. Even developing didn't yet come naturally to me. I'd only been working in the darkroom—and supervised by my teacher—for about three months by the time I left for Nicaragua in late October. I was going into a new territory, speaking to women whose experience was radically different from any I had ever known. I would travel for three months all over the country, and I would photograph as I taped, conversed, questioned, gradually made sense of what I was learning.

My invitation was issued by the Ministry of Culture, and my old friend, poet and Catholic priest, Ernesto Cardenal. He provided for my basic needs, gave me a jeep and a driver, and pushed me out into the Nicaraguan countryside. I found a photographer willing to give me the key to his darkroom; each morning at five I would go over and develop my rolls of film from the day before, hanging the long strips of negatives up to dry. Late at night, after a full day's work, I would return, print up contact sheets, and take them home to study and learn from before the next day's work. So, even within the context of the field work itself, I was using the photographic process as part of the overall experience. My Cuban teacher had offered to have me send all my rolls back to be developed by him. He was afraid I might ruin a few, since I was still such a novice. Of course I did ruin a few. But what I learned about the technical side of photography by doing it myself—in a do or die situation—as well as the ways in which I began to realize how my vision worked with and through my experience as an oral historian, were invaluable to me.

It wasn't easy to interview a woman who had been raped in prison by Somoza's National Guard, one who had lost a child or several children to repression, or even one who had militarily occupied a city—it wasn't easy to inspire that woman's trust, engage her in conversation, guide her through the telling of her story, operate the tape recorder and make meaningful pictures of her, all at the same time. I learned as I went along. I am sure that in some instances the photography diluted the intensity of the spoken interview—and in others the interview detracted from what might otherwise have been a deeper photographic study. But there was something else: something was born from the

bonding of word and image, something that was to come to a clearer fruition when I'd finished the field work for this book and was back home involved in the actual production stage.

I had my raw material: transcripts of the spoken interviews, research I had done in Nicaraguan archives, the experience of having been in Nicaragua—and my negatives. I found myself working all day on the transcripts, cutting, pasting, rearranging, extracting the essence of each interview and building what would become the chapters of *Sandino's Daughters*. At night I would go into the darkroom and work with the images of the woman whose voice I had heard all day. And I began to realize that a deep and important relationship emerged from working with the text and from printing images of the person at the same time—one had a direct influence on the other. My familiarity with the woman's words provoked me to print her image in one way or another. And the image, rising out of the developer each night as I worked in the darkroom, in turn informed the way I tended to handle the text.

V

The black and white still image—devoid of color, without movement, with a past that cannot lead to the present—is not the “truth” packaged for us by the value system society tries to impress upon us. We can make another more meaningful truth, a “shock of discontinuity” which can lead us to our true continuum.

I don't like talking to people before photographing them. I would rather get to know them through the camera's eye. Come to them clean, in an instant or throughout a session which is process and discovery. The talking can come later, and often it is fulfilling. It may change how I print a picture, but it cannot affect the initial encounter.

I don't like using a long lens, except when absolutely necessary. I like my 35mm and occasionally use a 28mm when a situation demands it. I like to get close to people and things. What happens in my meeting with what is being photographed is an important part of the product as I experience and produce it.

In Cuba and Nicaragua, where I photographed for the first time, people love to have their pictures taken. It is an event, valued even when they know they will probably never see the results: the product of the encounter. (Actually, I love printing for people, and almost always send those pictures I like to the people in them. One of my most treasured memories is having walked miles across Cuban countryside to spend a day with a group of families in one of the poorest and most remote areas of the country. No one had ever seen a camera before. No one knew how one worked. I explained the functions of the different lenses. People fetched relatives; everyone wanted to pose. I later sent 100 8 x 10's to those who had given so willingly of themselves to my images.)

In Cuba and Nicaragua people love to have their pictures taken, so basically the problem is keeping people from posing. Getting the picture you want, which is not always—or even usually—the picture they want you to have. In Canada and the United States there is a sense most people feel entitled to a privacy that often excludes photography. At least photography without consultation and

permission. I am developing a new way of moving among people in this country.

Sometimes there are other impediments to immediacy and/or candid images here. While in Latin America I always felt right photographing people—even in extreme situations such as having to shoot directly into the coffin of a young war victim while his or her family mourned their death in their own home. Here I have experienced for the first time a sense of doubt in specific instances.

One such instance occurred along a highway approaching the Grand Canyon in Arizona. It was Navajo country. Spotting an otherwise vast and lonely landscape were occasional lean-to's, where mostly women with children offered turquoise and silver jewelry for sale. An American flag was almost always the only thing adorning the several boards tacked together to provide a minimal protection from the sun.

We stopped and walked up to one of these stands. A Navajo woman smiled and gave us prices on some of the pieces. A younger woman—her daughter?—stood beside her. Several smaller children played in back. I wanted to photograph the woman and the children. But instead of simply whipping out my camera (as I would have in Nicaragua), or even asking permission, I began fingering the jewelry. Even as I bought a beautiful ring, I realized my only interest was the series of images I wanted to get on film. As I paid for the ring, I asked the woman if she minded a few pictures. I asked in such a way as to be totally rhetorical; I was already snapping my shutter, shot after shot.

At first the woman seemed uncomfortable. But gradually she warmed to the idea, and something happened between us—she began to feel better about what I was doing; a relationship of some kind was initiated. The children came from where they had been playing. They too became a part of the experience. I finally left, elated. Thinking hard about what it means to be an anglo woman imposing my camera's eye on a Native American family, conscious of a sense of responsibility impossible to transmit at that moment, joyous at the pictures I thought I had.

Did I have them? Something almost inexplicable prevented my ever knowing. I had forty rolls of film to develop, and I was going through them in four-reel tanks. On the first tank, I reversed my chemicals for the first and only time in my experience as a photographer. Four of my rolls were blanks because of that, and the roll with the Navajo woman and her children on it turned out to be one of them.

I need to make pictures, but working in the darkroom gives me, by far, my greatest sense of fulfillment. It is there I really feel complete and energized. I can enter a darkroom to make a few prints and come out six or eight hours later, hardly aware that much time has passed.

Making pictures is the most open-ended avenue in my life right now. Currently, I am working in two lines: with images of mothers and daughters, taking off from a particular picture of a mother and daughter made in the small Nicaraguan village of San Pedro Norte, on the Honduran border; and on a series for which I have been working slowly, registering an image here, another there. I call these pictures architectural. But it is the architecture of ideology. There is a middle-aged Asian American woman leaning against a display window in San Francisco, in which a mannequin wears the epitome of white bridal gowns. In

another image a neat little store front is entirely filled with a large American flag, and down in one corner of the window there is the printed sign: BEWARE OF DOG. A single light bulb extends from a metal brace over the door, and its shadow is reflected in the sun on the sidewalk below. A number of these “architectural” pictures—although not all of them—involve windows and what is reflected in them.

Making pictures seems more than ever important to me since returning to the United States after twenty-three years of living in Latin America. My eyes are still new. I will fight against them ever getting old.

—Albuquerque, July 1984.

1. *Las mujeres*, edited and with an introduction by Margaret Randall, Siglo XXI, Editores, S.A., Mexico, 1970.
2. I now use a Pentax LX, with a modified motor drive, and most often a 35mm lens. I also carry with me a 50mm macro and a 28mm.
3. Ramón Martínez Grandal, known simply as Grandal.



Reflections IV: Half-Moon Bay, California



Anna: Albuquerque, New Mexico

MARGARET RANDALL AMERICAN IMAGES



Cyclers: Yakima Valley, Washington



Weight Lifters: Berkeley, California



Reflection II: New York City



Reflection: San Francisco, California



Barbara: Yakima Valley, Washington

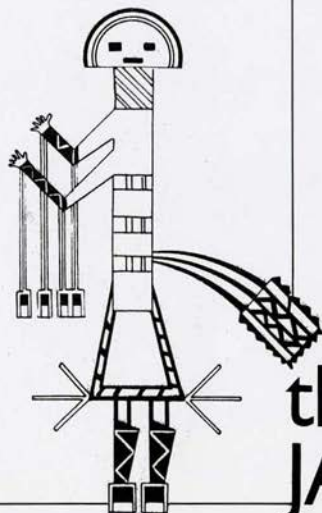


Mother and Daughters: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

The Spirit Bundles

We stand beneath the buckeye tree
and the big pods rattle in the wind.
Grandma listens, and sometimes
sings in a thin, wavering voice
already like a ghost's.
Her hand rests on my shoulder.
I am her eyes.
I shift my weight and strain
to hear the voices she attends.

Grandma has staked the other world
to our earth with her spirit bundles.
They mark the path her heart will take
when it is time to leave.
She will follow a trail of feathers
hung to elderberry and sage,
or knots of long grass, bent
by her old hands. She will not need
my eyes to guide her.



Journey

Near the end of September
we will leave for the mountains.
We will travel west to east,
an old journey,
over the shoulders of ancient volcanoes,
through manzanita, sage, rabbit brush,
following streambeds of flat, white stones.
In the canyons the oak leaves will shimmer
in dry heat, cones will drop
from sugar pines scattering seeds
in what appear to be small, brown wings.
As we pass the Buttes
we will say prayers for the departed
whose way to the meadows above
was a difficult one,
and hurry
toward the landscape of the unseen,
beyond black mesas,
eroded cliffs,
cliff swallows.
Up there, in the red earth country
is our home.

three poems
JANICE GOULD



1.

At first glance,
I am absorbed,
stolen away.
Below my heart,
each time

we separate,
you surface again in me.

2.

A lake
in the wildlands. It is twilight.
This is where we meet.
Shadows

half submerge,
tall grass laps at the shore,
a bleached, uprooted tree,
limbs cracked off, points out
a dark trail
into the suddenly deep,
past brown, waving weeds which surround
its thick stalk.

When we dive,
sliding along the trunk, our bellies
brush the soft dirt of the pond.
It flakes up in swirls of glittering dust.
Our toes have hard claws,
our hands, square
as paws, are strong.

The lodge
is entered from below, the doorway
brightens the water. It is warm and damp
inside, the woven floor
tamped down. Each day
we pile willow sticks,
enough to winter on
when the pond turns to ice.

3.

At first absorbed,
then stolen away,
like in the old days
when wandering too far from home
we came to the edge
of our known world,

drawn into the dark,
frightened,
drawn into the dark
where power beckons,
or madness,
or whatever heals.



The Beaver Woman

"MEM & PEP"

VICKIE SEARS

Old they were.
in their nineties.
living in the far back of the reservation
in a cabin so
ancient
no one could remember who or when built it.

A burnt grass ranch was their
breathing place.

They and the horses.
head throwing mane whipping summersun sucking
beasts who more owned Mem and Pep than they them.

Summerdry earthcrack
turned
winter broken hard
to
earthgrowgreen year on year from
a childhood of growing together.

He pulled her into soft springrain.
she rose indignant laughing ran.
things were full between them.

married they could not recall a time when
they were not together.

They went to the city only once
understanding
they had all they needed.

the city never fooled them.

Small changes came.
kerosine was good.
a truck was fine but
essentials never came from the city.

Pep in wheelchair watched
a mellowed mingled Mem crawl to hide
in cornfield rows because soldiers were coming.

Mem jealous of Pep was teased by him for glaring
at all female ranch hands.

they enjoyed their game.

Such stories they could tell.
spirits wizards mile high trees

streamthick salmon caught in grasswoven nets.
cedar sage sweetgrass sacred tobacco
with meanings remembered
mostly
by Elders.

Mem built a livingroom middle fire
thinking herself in a long ago forest.

Pep never laughed.
he traveled with her.

They slept away hot afternoons.
preferred to do storyspinning nightwebs to
audiences of new generations.

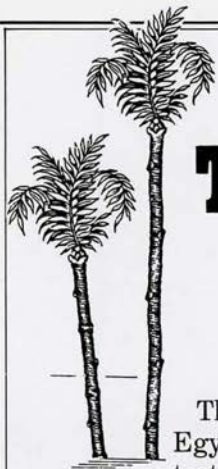
One springwarm day Pep shook Mem
couldn't wake her
called from the cabin door.

Their son carried her away.
Pep's eyes silent loud.

On death's fourth day Pep sat in the window watching
mares with colts stomp springgreen grass.
finally spoke pointing

"You bring her here that woman with the spotted rump.
We'll ride to see Old Mem."

We did. He did. Died.



The Night Train to Asswan

1.

The sleek German train is run by the French Wagon-Lit, and staffed by Egyptians, dinner is served in my compartment. It is airline food, but somewhat tastier, chicken and macaroni, rice pudding and an orange and a piece of cheese.

It has gotten dark quickly and all I can see outside the window are mysterious lights passing by. There, the shadow of a cart, a mosque, bright colored lights strung up in a small town. I undress in the dark, open the blinds and write the brilliant colored post cards I've bought in Cairo, choosing which one will suit which of my friends. The Nile shines beside the train and I press my face to the glass to see boat lights in the night.

Then, suddenly over the loudspeaker, an announcement. "Ladies and Gentlemen. Happy Meal! Bon appetit! . . ." This is followed by wild insinuating Arabic music. "Come to my club car for my party evening. Listen to Egyptian belly dancing music!"

It's a riot. Fred and I meet in the hall and go.

The party car is hopping. Two girls in matching red tee-shirts with little belts are sitting at one of the round tables. A gaggle of German teenagers arrives. There is heavy cruising. Tourists interspersed with Egyptians. The car gets crowded. The sound of laughter and merriment increases. Egyptian music has been replaced by 50s rock and roll—glasses clink. Then suddenly over by the bar where there is now standing room only, a true punk makes an appearance in a dazzling fuchsia Mohawk. The music seems to pause—just a beat. All heads turn. It is the moment that everyone has been waiting for—the height of the party. The music grows louder, heavier. Sound effects come on, barking dogs, a car crash. "Run, run, run away . . ."

Prose and Poetry

CAROLE BOVOSO

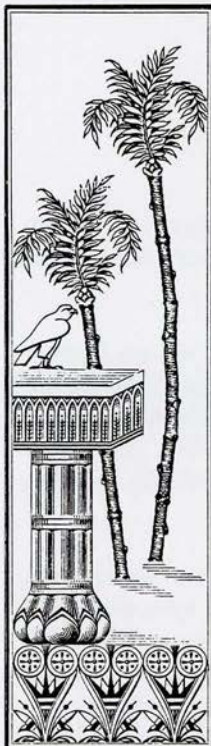
2.

And in the midst of it all here am I, on my mystical quest to Egypt . . . it is so strange and incongruous . . . and yet there is something truly marvelous about finding myself on this rock 'n' roll train into the past.

But later in the night, in my compartment once more, I sense we are farther into the heart of Egypt. I see the silhouettes of palms, black against the indigo sky. I become so excited I cannot sleep. These are not the palms I've known and loved in Southern Spain, Southern California and Southern France . . . these are Egyptian palms . . . distinctively shaped . . . looming tall, majestically fronded . . . this is, I tell myself, scarcely believing it . . . the real McCoy.

Finally I force my eyelids to close. But I awaken from time to time to see *them* passing by the window. In the morning I am awake in a rush. My eyes are wide. A golden vista. Absolutely no fooling pale gold, lush palms, houses, clusters of palms and more palms dot the landscape. I am so excited that I throw on some clothes and make a mad dash for the club car where the windows are bigger . . . stepping on the porter's foot as I dash by. He is a sweet brown boy whom I love, and knowingly, he makes coffee for us right away.

I feel privileged to see this Nubian morning. A woman is hanging up sheets, a few men walking in the fields, a donkey being urged along. At six a.m. I watch sleepy tourists descend at Luxor. We are going further south to Asswan. I watch them walking away down the platform as if in a dream, glad that I am continuing on. Something on the train makes a soft musical sound as we slowly leave Luxor. It is like wooden pipes striking together. A ribbon of a road beside the train, though black, appears blue because of the light. A donkey cart goes by at a canter . . . a man and a small child in blue sit in back. So many donkeys, they, with their peculiar gait, are even more of an indication of exotica than the camels I begin to spot working in the fields, or ambling along the roads. Not since my first transatlantic crossing to Europe years ago, when I stood transfixed on the upper deck and Spain was pointed out to me on the left, and Africa lay a vast unknown entity on my right and I felt pulled – pulled in each direction . . . have I felt so excited. Finally Africa! It really is like coming home.



The First Night in Asswan

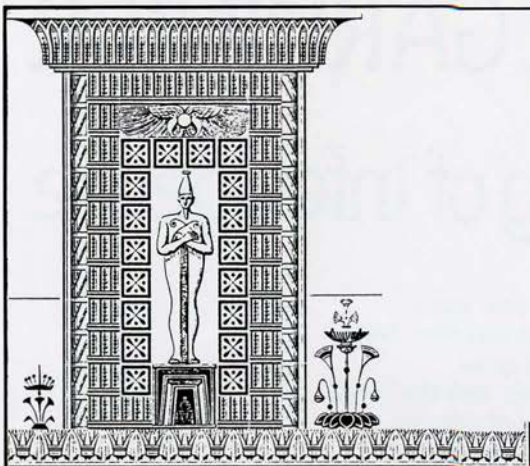
Something is happening outside my window. I awaken from a nap and pull the half open drapes wide. It is the sunset. It takes hours to go down, raspberry to black raspberry along the hills in front of me.

On the Nile, fellucas glide across the mauve reflection of the sky. Suddenly a flock of silver Ibis birds moves in swift formation, rippling across the sky. The chant from a nearby mosque follows them across the water. And the birds rise becoming little white pinpoints, then veils of clouds beside the bright and steady planet Venus which chooses that moment to begin to shine.

Gift in Upper Egypt

In the night the flower smell overwhelms strolling guests on the pathway leading up to the hotel. Stunned I stop to find its source. From the darkness a turbaned figure in long galabaya steps forth. "Here. It is here," he beckons. As I approach he hands me honeysuckle and points to the heavy laden tree above him. I thank him profusely and wander down the path. Then when I am just beyond the turning point his voice questions softly, "Baksheesh? Baksheesh?"

On the morning I bought your beads
I climbed upward toward the final resting
place of the Aga Khan. "Nubian, Nubian . . ." whispered
the felluca boatmen crouched at the water's edge.
Camels braying, ducks quacking, tourists chattering
The road up to the Aga Khan's is steep hot and dry
It was enough to buy your scented beads in the cool
shade of the flowering trees, call Sika from his
breakfast and set sail on the river again.



In Saggara

I wanted to sleep in the desert
beside King Zoser's Tomb
with the temple dogs
standing guard.

Valley of the Kings, Luxor

On the morning I was sick
I couldn't believe I climbed the mountain.
At the top the Valley of the Queens was hazy
and I felt funny about my 99¢ plastic sandals
from Webers. But when I looked down at my guide's
feet, I saw that he was wearing a pair of sky blue Zori's.
He wrote in my journal in flowing Arabic and then translated:
Next time you will with the children come to all the mountain.
He smiled a Nubian full soul smile that took my breath
and pointed to the distant peak of Pyramid Mountain.
I gathered more fossils, remnants of some long ago sea.
Yes, I replied. I will.

SUZANNE GARDINIER

The Gathering of Intelligence

My brother left one year ago—
one afternoon, five small men came
to ask where he had gone.
My mother told them, "Sift the sand,
ask the mountains, call into the rain.
He is with God, in all these places."
A neighbor saw his boy's head bent
to enter the back of a pick-up truck,
flanked by two small, common men.
My mother knew that God's hand gripped
my brother's bony elbow. No body
was found—she hears his lips answer
from where she calls him: the deep cove pool,
the shallow, sunburned foothill valleys,
the edges of the small dirt road.

I am now the age he was—
I told the five to ask their fellow
murderers for his new address.
They grinned and clawed their bodies
into mine, each of the five, then knelt
on my chest with a hose to give me
water. My shouts tried for air
until I saw they would kill me—
then breath swam up silent
and they tired of the game.
They called this
the gathering of intelligence.
My mother crouched to pick up beads
from the necklace they had broken,
cupped her hands in mine and let them fall.

She sings to him softly as we plant
homemade mines in the sand—I set
the trigger stick where she has packed
the nervous, stolen powder. When
our soldiers came, she pointed out
five photos of five common men. We dig
holes to swallow them, cut and complete
the deep, wise circle.

Lies I Believed

Before I drew your mouth to mine,
before opening your white shirt,
the door to a warm, lit room. When I was nine,

I thought all Black people lived
on an island off the Cape Cod
coast. The seven Black children
in my large grade school were their
daughters and sons. The heavy island
perfume rose warm from their skin. Beside
Adele Lopes, I smelled beach plum
and palms. I knew this.
This was knowledge. This was history.

I knew your people as children,
janitors, electrician's assistants, never
teachers, ministers, policemen, never

mothers, whose invisible hands
packed Philip Fernandes' lunch
and sewed to his thin shirts
buttons other children tore off.
This was reality. This was fact.

Each early spring, I sold
flower and vegetable seeds, door to door. Once
I walked down Pleasant Street, where
five Black families lived, in houses
with bucketed porches, yellow window shades.
A woman twice my height folded polished wood arms,
asked, "What ground are we gonna plant those in?"
She kicked at the ruts of packed, barren dirt,
laughed so sharp I turned and ran.

I came to you carrying
these small stones of memory, hidden
just under the surface of my skin.
How seldom our eyes met.
All the time we spent digging
in each other's bodies, rooting
for something hard and certain we could
carry out and keep, you were

loving your cut-jawed, smooth-haired,
bright-skinned dream, while I
loved some ghost of my own.



PHOTOGRAPHY: COLLEEN MCKAY

RUTHANN ROBSON

WAVES, NIGHT

1.

the moon looks full, but it's waning
 your mother
 wails that she's tired of life
 at this edge her same complaints
 salted over years
 irregular as tides out &
 farther out you are bloated
 & have abandoned your attempts
 to rescue her or any other woman
 including yourself

2.

we make our own traps, certainly
 but what did you expect? you were born
 with the moon in cancer born under
 a steel pier your first toys
 were the sharp & pliable wires
 of crabtraps you artfully constructed
 your own prison silly now
 to say what you intended: *i thought*
i was building a barricade a home

3.

Georgia O'Keeffe had no children
 now she is famous
 for Elizabeth Arden flowers gigantic
 in their femininity famous also
 for skulls & bones of bleached white
 raped from the desert gleaming fertile
 in unmitigated sun not-so-famous
 for her oiled testament to her brief affair
 with the midnight Atlantic deep blue slants
 & a pinpoint house of incandescence

4.

the not yet ripe peaches color
 of shore light
 five seconds before dusk the suntan oil
 color of beach foam when there's a frantic storm
 miles out at sea the color you are tempted
 to call yellow the color of the single
 fleck in the marine blue iris
 of your mother's left eye
 when she is angered dangerous as broken coral
 & as useless

5.

remember that woman writer, British
(something about a lighthouse)
(about a room) the woman who walked
into a cold spring river rock in her pocket
(something about death being the only experience
she would never write about) madness comes
not like a tidal wave but like eddies
on a sandbar the water is shallow & warm
harboring pieces of claws & eggs frail as air bubbles
she had no children either

6.

your mother bays like a sea wolf
a mythical siren a self appointed
sisyphus the waves crash her flesh
with dark rhythms rimmed in foam
leaving patterns of white like undecipherable runes
all round & content salt renders choice
& fate indistinguishable but the bait
is as shiny as ever submerged in its slowly
too slowly rusting cage of metal

HURRICANE SEASON

there are days
i hate the circle
and hunger for the hard
edges of life: strapped
blades on leather and
the risk of shaving too close
to the bone.

there are dawns
the birds are too
melodious and the blueness
of the shimmering sky
repulses. the light
is too gentle. i eat veal
for breakfast.

there are nights
i want thunder, catharsis,
a storm that shakes earthen
jars off their shelves.
i lust for lightning so fierce
it can crack
the serene potter
jagged to her core.

i do not believe
in violence, in force, in domination,
but i cannot separate myself
from the raging that has rimmed
my existence: the howling and
the barred canine teeth of
survival.

i cannot ignore
brutality, for power denied
sharpens the horizon, cutting
the blood sun as it sets
so red rays of pain spew loose.
then not even the moon
will be able

to calm us
or heal us.





photo: Colleen McKay

1958 was the last and the bloodiest year of dictator Fulgencio Batista's regime in Cuba. The population lived in terror. Many people disappeared. Many people died. Some were forced to flee the country for their lives because of their involvement with the underground "26 of July" revolutionary movement. On the 1st of January 1959, Batista was finally overthrown.

I LIKE HAVANA, EXCEPT SOMETIMES

mirtha n. quintanales

My name is Conchita and I'm seven years old. I'm pretty little but I know how to read and write. I live in Havana and I like it a lot except sometimes. I go to school everyday and I play the piano and I have lots of cousins. We visit Grandma every Sunday and we have fun pretending we know how to speak English. The grownups laugh at us but I don't think they know how to speak English either, only Grandpa because he worked for the Americans before he stopped, and they taught him how. And he's very old but he likes us kids a lot and he's saving money so I can go on a trip to Miami because I'm the oldest and I get the best marks in school. And I'm going to visit Aunt Nilda and Uncle Manolo and cousins Teté and Lito. They moved to Miami in 1957 and that's last year. Aunt Nilda said they had to, but she didn't say why.

Anyhow I really want to go there and visit them and maybe I'll like it even better than Havana. But I don't say this last part, I say I just want to go and play with Teté and Lito and I want to learn real English which is good for the university when I get bigger, because Papi says a lot of the books come in English only, and he studied medicine and that's a problem. Uncle Manolo wrote a letter and Grandma read it outloud and he said he found a job in a factory and it's very hard but everyday he comes home early and they watch t.v. all of them together, and that's very good, that's what I think.

Papi, he's always talking about Cuba being the best place to live because it's our country and he says in the United States it's not so good. And he says they don't like some people there, maybe us either, but I think they'd like me because everybody does. Like Mami and Grandma and the teachers, and everybody. And I think Americans are the prettiest and they have blue eyes which is the best, and they don't fight so much in their houses, only the Indians, which are bad. Papi says that's not true and the Indians are good, but it *is* true and they're mean, and I saw it on t.v. You can't tell grownups things because they say children don't know anything, like Papi, but I do know lots of things. Only I don't say I want to go to Miami and maybe I'll like it better than living in Havana, because Papi is going to get angry and that's not any good. Papi took me and Mami and my little brother Carlos to the inside of the province which is the country, and it's not Havana, and I didn't like it so much at all.

It was pretty, the trees and stuff, but the houses they weren't so pretty. They were ugly and real small and when you walk inside it's just like when you're outside, the floor specially. Only darker and you can't turn on the light because they don't have not even one lightbulb. And you can't go to the bathroom when you have to go because there isn't any, and I don't know what you do if you have to go real bad and you can't wait anymore. And it was so hot and I was very thirsty and Mami said I had to wait 'till we got home because some waters make you sick, that's what she said, and they only had that kind of water there, and it was awful. My favorite is Havana and I told Papi that, except sometimes.

Me and Mami we went to visit Carmen and she lives near our house and maybe she's Papi's cousin, I don't remember too good. She has two daughters, one bigger and one smaller and their names are Patricia and Lidia. She has a baby too and he's a boy and his name is Pepe. Carmen said this man who is her husband he just came and he gave her the baby and then he went away and that's all. And she told Mami there's hardly no money left for food or anything. So me and Mami we took them rice and beans and milk and some bread and other things too. Mami gave some of my dresses to Patricia and Lidia, which I don't have a lot of, and they still fit me, and she told me you don't need that many but I do, only I didn't say that, because it's no good anyway.

Anyhow Carmen and Patricia and Lidia and the baby they live in a funny house. We went there and they have a big patio in the middle, and a lot of people live there but they aren't the family, they're neighbors. And they have an upstairs and a downstairs but their real house is not all of the place only a little part. And they have one bed which I don't know how all of the four of them fit in it, and their kitchen they don't have one, they cook only one thing, then another, in something I don't know what it is, maybe a little stove which is on a table. They have one bathroom but it's not inside their house and I had to go and it's in a hallway and it belongs to a lot of the neighbors too. And it wasn't too nice and it stunk and I didn't like it. They had a lot of little kids in the big patio and they made lots of noise and some of them they didn't have clothes, they were naked. I looked at them and I didn't want to anymore, I wanted to go home already and finally we did.

Mami goes to work and she teaches piano in a school for music. I take my piano lessons in her school and I know many girls there, and most of them they're not very friendly, but they are a little. The girls they go to another school also and I do too. And they wear uniforms from their other schools and they're starched real good and they look new all the time. I wear uniforms also, only they're not starched all that good and they don't look so new, they're old from last year, and I'm in the second grade now. We had a recital at Mami's school and all of the girls they got flowers and they were inside baskets with ribbons and stuff, they were so pretty. I didn't get any and I wish I did get them because that means I'm special. But Mami says flowers they cost a lot of money and I'm special anyway and I play the piano real good.

Across the street from Mami's school they have a hospital for children and I see them all the time, a lot of them. Maybe they are with their mothers but sometimes their mothers they are by themselves. And one time one of their mothers, I saw her, she was screaming real loud by the doors of the hospital, and then some men they hugged her real hard, and they said something but I didn't

hear it. Anyhow she yelled louder all the time and then lots of people came and finally the men took her inside of the hospital. Papi, he knows some of the doctors from the hospital and they came over to our apartment, and they didn't tell me anything but they talked to themselves. And they said so many children in the hospital are very sick and they die, and I was very surprised because only old people are supposed to die, or maybe not so old, but kids are too little to die already. Don't you think?

Our house is good but maybe it's not so good all the time. I have my very own bedroom and I didn't before but Papi called these men and they put a wall in the porch and they made windows and everything and now Carlos he sleeps in his own room too and I'm glad. We have a bathroom and it's inside. The shower is broken and you can't fix it ever, Papi says, and anyway the water is cold only. Mami puts some of it in a pot to make it hot on the stove and then she puts it in a bucket in our bathtub and it's bad everyday but specially the winter. We have a baby-sitter, she comes everyday and she cooks and she cleans the house too and she takes care of me and Carlos but Mami does also. And one night I was sleeping in my bed and I was sick and then there was a bad smell and I woke up and there was a black smoke coming in through my window and my parents they said hurry get up and Carlos too, and they were running this way and that way and some neighbors too, and finally it wasn't so bad but it was scary for a while.

Then some of the neighbors said, I heard them, this isn't living, and when are we going to get rid of him, and they better hurry up, these people who're in a movie or something, only you can't see them because they're underground. I don't know who they are, except maybe one, but I know underground. That's like a game of hide-and-seek, except you really want to make sure that the person who's looking doesn't find you, never, and that's what it means.

We have one picture hanging on the wall of our livingroom. The man in the photo is called a martyr. A martyr is a person that some people say he should live longer and other people say he lived too long already. And this martyr he was a friend of Papi's and sometimes I look at him real hard and he looks a lot like Papi and I don't like that. I don't want Papi to be like any martyr because they have to be dead and that's awful even if they're important.

Mami makes me go to bed at 9:00. But I hardly ever go to sleep until Papi gets home and a lot of times it's real late and Mami turns off the t.v. because they don't have no more programs. Usually I wait and wait and then I hear Papi's keys when he opens the door, then I hear him when he comes in, and then he whispers something to Mami like maybe hello. After that I look at the bottom part of the door of my bedroom and the smoke of Papi's cigar it starts to come right under it. Then the room gets all filled up with the smoke which smells real nice and it always makes me sleepy and that's the best thing in the whole wide world.

Do you know what I do? I make myself invisible. Well, what I really do is I hide behind the doors or I stretch myself out on Grandma's couch in the livingroom, or I lie down on her bed which is in her bedroom and that's next to the livingroom, and I pretend I'm asleep. Sometimes I sit on the floor in a corner of the livingroom and I get so quiet that after a while nobody knows I'm there anymore. That's like being invisible, isn't it? I like doing this because everybody forgets they're supposed to talk soft and then they talk loud and I hear what they say to themselves which is very important.

Many times the grownups they can't find the newspapers or the Bohemias and that's because I take them and hide them in a special place that I'm not telling, and I go there and I read them when nobody is looking. And I'm very good and they don't ask me do you know where they are or anything, and they don't ask my cousins either because they're too little and they don't read so good and they play with their toys. And anyhow maybe they just think they forgot where they put them, Grandpa's dictionary too, which a lot of times they can't find it because I took it also. And that's because I've got to find a lot of words like guerilla and revolution and torture. I asked Papi one time what is torture and then his face it got wrinkled and maybe he was upset or maybe he was angry and I told him I don't want to know, honest. But I really did and that's why I have to take the dictionary because it's not any good to ask grownups questions. All of the time they look at you kinda funny like they want to see what you're thinking in your head and then they ask *you* questions, and they notice you more, and they never forget to speak soft when you're in the room and you never hear the important things.

I got invited to Maria Luisa's birthday party. She goes to Mami's school and she lives in "El Bilmore" and that's the fanciest neighborhood in Havana. Papi didn't want to let me go but finally he did because Mami told him it's only a children's party and anyway what could happen and all that. So we got in the car and then Papi he got very serious and he said to play all I want but don't talk too much and better not talk altogether just in case, but that's all and I didn't know why. Anyhow we got to Maria Luisa's house and there was a man who had a uniform and he had a big gun and he was sitting on a chair which was next to a tall black iron gate. And he talked kinda nasty and he asked us who are you and what are you doing here, and what do you want and that sort of thing. But Papi he told him we're here for the party and then he got friendly and he smiled and he said nice things like maybe he didn't want me and Papi to get mad at him. I didn't like him at all even if he said I looked pretty.

Maria Luisa's house was as big and fancy as the houses in American movies. I never went to a place like that before! The house it had air-conditioning and it had screened windows and they had many pictures on the walls and they had rugs and statues and they had trees inside. They had a lot of servants, not only one, and they live there Maria Luisa said, and they were wearing white clothes all of them, and one of them was a cook and he was a man. I didn't want to play at first because they had so many pretty things to look at but I did anyway and it was a good party.

We went swimming in one of the swimming pools they had in the backyard, and it was the big one, and not the little one they had for the babies, because they can't swim, and we know how already. Some of the servants who were baby-sitters, they hid these boiled eggs that were painted colors, and we weren't supposed to eat them like regular eggs, we were supposed to look for them under the trees and around the tennis courts and down by this place where they kept horses. And I found a couple of them because I'm very good at finding things that people hide, that's what Mami says and she's right. So I found two eggs and the baby-sitters they gave me two presents but I gave one away to Cristina because she didn't look very good and she didn't find any for herself and she's my girlfriend.

When Papi came back to take me home he took Cristina too because her father, he called our house, and he asked Papi to take her home. Anyway we were driving away from Maria Luisa's house and Cristina, she has a big mouth, she asked Papi is it true Maria Luisa's father is a bad man and he kills people so the president can keep his job. She said her father told her something like that, and he almost didn't let her come to the party. Papi looked very angry and his face was red, but he didn't yell at Cristina. And I was so glad it wasn't me asking the questions, or else. He never told her anything and he took her home, and then he said to me tell me everything that happened at the party to make sure I didn't say nothing I wasn't supposed to, which I didn't know what it was.

One night he and Mami they went to the movies near our house and it was midnight and they didn't come home yet. My little brother and the baby-sitter they were sleeping but I was awake in my bed listening to the radio which I like to do when I get tired of reading my books. Then something exploded real loud and at first I thought everybody in the world died, but after a while I knew it wasn't true because I was in my bed and I wasn't dead and it just couldn't be. Anyway I wanted to find out what happened and I tried to get up and change the station on the radio and listen to the news if they had any, but I couldn't move my arms or my legs or anything even if I wasn't dead.

And I thought maybe the baby-sitter she will come to my room and she'll change the station on the radio but she didn't wake up or maybe she did wake up and decided not to come. I couldn't call her because I tried and no voice came out. Then the phone was ringing and I thought I better try and get up and answer it because I was thinking and thinking and Mami and Papi they weren't home yet and what about if it's important, the call, and the baby sitter wasn't coming to get the phone either and she just kept sleeping and sleeping or pretending, I don't know which.

And I got up finally and I went to the phone which is in the hall, and it was a long time but it was ringing anyway so I answered it. It was one of Papi's friend and he wanted to talk to Papi and I felt better that nothing was wrong, but maybe something was wrong and Papi's friend he didn't know it and I didn't know it and I didn't feel so good again. Paco said don't worry it doesn't help anything and I'll call you again later, and I said o.k. Then I went back to my bed and laid down and I started to make pictures in my head like the movies. And I lived in Miami and not in Havana, and I could speak English real good, and then I went to Disneyland which is in California and it's very far away but it looks so pretty on t.v. I flew around in the sky like the little fairy that does flip-flops and she does cartwheels in the air and stuff, and she has a magic wand that makes the program start, and who knows what else.

I made pictures in my head but they weren't like dreams because I was awake and I was waiting for Mami and Papi to come home. And I waited and waited. Finally I heard Papi's keys and he opened the door and he and Mami came in and they whispered something like it's good to be home. After that I looked at the bottom part of the door of my bedroom and the smoke of Papi's cigar it started to come right under it. Then the room got all filled up with the smoke which smells real nice and it always makes me sleepy and that's the best thing in the whole wide world. Do you know that?

ROBERTA GOULD

this morning

Four iris opened this morning
Marie, 81, tends them
smiles as if death never existed
I'd like to sit and gaze at them
listen to dusk's liquid thrushes
to go into a rapture under the willow
lush with its million leaves
or to be the fire mouthed turtle
who proceeds as if now were forever
the one I lifted from the road an hour ago
and placed in the thick crack grass

But there's a decapitation
My money buys it
And someone's balls are busted
an example for all who'd resist . . .
my wages are stolen to pay for it
Now a face is pushed down a toilet
My salary pays the torturers

I'd like to gaze at the poppies all day
their crepe illusion
their deep purple dust
but history gnaws with persistence
and the invisible present is present

The frogs start to croak
and the fireflies flit over the meadow
signal each other unaware of extinction
Everyone knows it feels impotent
as murder's machine grinds out its music
and we're lulled as they kill
steal the land of a people
in another latitude
and we're drugged
as they take to the sky
to conquer the earth
for the junk food conglomerates

I'd like to gaze at the poppies all day
their crepe illusion, their deep purple dust
but history gnaws with persistence
and the invisible present is present

manhattan

Who could have dreamt this paved place,
diesel air, streams invisible, shoved back to source,
when the horizon still dwelt here
stars, forests, rabbits, sunrise?
Yet the dog finds her way home
that brick building, one in ten thousand,
through two miles of traffic, a fenced-in overpass,
six avenues that harbor no trees.
How has she done it, aside from the landmarks:
blocks of projects, boarded up tenements,
heaps of predictable garbage?
Can we, too, hone our senses to the magic she sniffs
in her daily investigations?
If she has retained her powers in this unreal landscape
can we complain the sky doesn't talk?
that two neighborhood parks are not quite enough
to awaken our knowing blood?

everywhere

Everywhere there's some stray dog
or another and, scrawny himself,
underfed but under the wing
of the new neighbors
he's taken from village to village.
Everywhere dogs sniff the ruins,
hungrier than even he's been,
ribs protruding
eyes pasty, half closed.
They slink by at a distance
wary of the meat hoarders
and their stones.
The boy's name is Ramón
He sits on a jagged foundation
thick with grass and ten years of moss
his arm half circling
the wreck of a puppy,
eyes smiling so that
if you snapped a long range photograph
you might miss the hunger,
you might smile, too.

Worms and Women Have Spun Magic

Silk threads stream like sunlight against the hard-clanking metal machine. She perches on a moving chair, delicately capturing strands onto wooden spools. Her fingers are as graceful as those of a Beijing Opera star.

Outside, beneath high blue sky, they are building another factory wing. Outside, past a gold sign declaring monthly quotas one sister carries bricks; another slaps mortar. They prepare for more rooms of color and clank and silk.

A white cotton baker's cap covers her short black hair. Tucked near the rim are seven strands of silver. This hair is silver, not grey, and shinier than anything spun in Suzhou. She first found the silver in her photograph, one of twelve, on the model worker poster.

Outside her daughter sings in the nursery. There she boards for five days at a time with other workers' children. Down the slide she streams, sleek as satin. Clapping her hands, she squeals high. It is hard for a mother to hear so far away. It is hard to hear at all after a week of screeching spools.

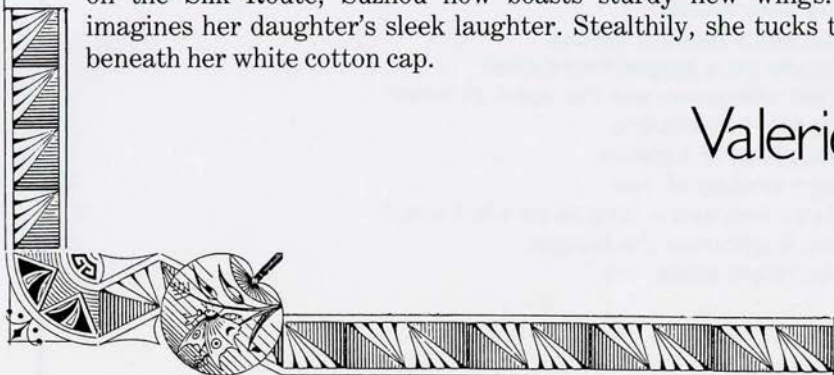
Inside from the outside, come tourist women to flash cameras and take notes in little books. A dozen foreigners talk quick as thread as if she could not understand or hear. They point and stare at her white hat, ricesack apron, flowered blouse and black shoes. She trains her attention on the silk and soon they disappear.

Outside they return, burdened by bags of clothing from the factory shop. Worms and women have spun magic in Suzhou since the Tang Dynasty. Marco Polo, himself, made several trips here from the outside.

Pressing the foot lever, she zips to the end of the turquoise row. She supervises blue quivering into green into scarves, drapes, dresses, robes. For Marco Polo's followers. For flashing ladies to wear outside to the Beijing Opera.

Or inside-out, like so many reversible robes sent to Paris. Four thousand years on the Silk Route, Suzhou now boasts sturdy new wings. Meanwhile, she imagines her daughter's sleek laughter. Stealthily, she tucks the silver threads beneath her white cotton cap.

Valerie Miner



NANCY SWISHER

The Revolution of the Body, Outwardly/Inward

I

Golden flowers in the field before, and afterwards here unmeasurable. The ruler divided into units can't measure the golden flowers this spring, or from any other, but it can measure the cigarette butts still-life in the ashtray. Can it be the rain on the roof again, and nowhere to go? Were they daffodils, or were they yellow asters closer to the ground than cattails, brown solid spikes whose leaves blow in the wind similar to bamboo, but not as complex a sound. I don't know, but does it matter, unless our bellies are also golden. What if the sun comes through not only the window, but our bellies as well, till the skin smells of kindness. Yes, it smells of kindness. It rotates around the sun especially now, neutral, but not without pleasure hardened by time in the world. There is still danger. Only one of the duck's eggs hatched. And there were three hundred and fifty bones collapsing. So let the sun press your eyelids, first one, then the other. Yes, like granite baking.

II

The sun passed in and out of the clouds every few minutes, splashing the room with gold light, and taking it away, again and again, this swelling of sunlight and then its fading. So beautiful. And you, so stretched, so curled, so intertwined your spine rises from your back. Your breathing paused. I watched the sunken place of your stomach, your bare skin, the color of parsnips. It was then I saw you. Yes, the color of parsnips. I waited for the sunken place to rise again, filling with breath, pumping from the deep. I remembered the beached jellyfish we examined together last May. Remember how the tourists watched us pretend to eat them. You would bend over, licking your lips, then slowly raise your head and stare at me, you'd point your finger and twitch your eyebrows, looking back and forth from me to the jellyfish. And I would look around, as if to say, who me? And we always ended the play by licking our lips and sitting cross-legged to face the ocean. You're breathing again. I'm always afraid your belly won't come back up, you breathe so slowly. Can I keep my hand there, on your parsnip skin, for just a while?

HerTime, HerDistance

I

"Mz. Dofty?"

"Yes, darlin?"

"How long's it been since my mother died?"

"Come here and sit on my lap sweetheart. Come on now."

The child fondles the safety pins on Mz. Dofty's apron. And waits.

Then speaks. "How much *time* has it been? That's what I was wonderin about. The time. I'm tryin to understand how long she will be dead."

"Sweetheart, it's been about four months."

"Not even a year yet?"

"No, just about four months, since April."

"But it was snowin?"

"It snowed in April that year." Ella Dofty begins to speak inwardly, to herself more than to the child. "The snow. How it snowed and snowed that day I thought it would never stop. The forsythia bloomin with snow on it piling high up on that one small limb outside the kitchen window. There. See it sweetheart? Now it's all green leaves. That's what your Mama loved so much about the flower. It was her favorite. She loved that the flowers came before the leaves. That's what she loved. She'd be out there everyday watchin how one more flower had opened. She'd put her hand under the long limbs hangin down almost to the ground and lift them up, and stare for long periods of time it seemed to me as I'd watch her lookin, wonderin myself what she was thinkin about starin that way at the flowers. But I knew what she was thinkin." The child's eyes are fixed upon the forsythia bush outside the kitchen window about which Ella Dofty speaks. "She was thinkin how much she loved bein alive, how much she loved just bein alive, and the love, the love was all. I don't believe she ever stopped lovin. I can't remember her not. Every person up and down this creek. Every one of em."

"She'll be dead forever, won't she."

"Yes, sweetheart."

"And that's how far away the stars are isin it."

II

Somewhere, dreams are still tears pourin out the face runnin down skin wet and wet and then wiped, the dream of happiness, the dream of prayer that life continues, that the jets won't come, that the barns remain forever the smells of hay forever, the red clover, the alfalfa, the bees in July forever. Somewhere, the dreams still sing like Nina Simone forever, and she smiles from east to west forever, forever, the melody invented right then for lovers, if only the love forever, and scream, forever. Come. Scream. Come forever. The wind. Forever. Coming into the wind.

III

Which direction to look was still inside her. She knew where the moon would be, and it was there, in the direction of the wind. Blue sky. Down the sidewalk an old man held his hands closely to his body like a baby. He would die the next day. He felt this. The crows waited for something beside the puddles beneath the hemlocks. Three black crows facing the same direction.

Lila skipped past them saying hello crows, and down the street she went, walking with her heart placed just in front of her by two inches it felt. And she was thinking that what the people see is not at all what she is. And she stopped figuring whose fault this was a long time ago. For now, a song came to her right through the space between her body and her heart, it squeezed through. A new melody, she sang with her throat, up and down, a simple tune which became the world to her, as she crossed the next street, and the dog, who sits in the snow all winter long, melting his presence into it.

Three Interviews

I

There wasn't always a reluctance
to face the world. It used to be
down where the barn was
we played
and played, and frightened each other
inside tunnels of hay.
We'd climb down
from the loft where the swallows lived
and sneak around to where
the cows were kept, back when
the village was a village, and stories
were lived and told soon after.
Donna and I played there. She works
at the factory now. She says that when
the horn blows, they all wince, and eat
the last bite of bologna and cheese.

II

One day I saw a car replace a baby.
I swear.
I mean
I wash a car
but it's not something I enjoy.
Do it,
get it done
kind of thing.
There was a little tiny baby
held right in front of his eyes
and he kept right on scrubbing
the window, wiping it, flipping
the seat forward, dusting
the license plate, and that little
baby was right there,
tucked inside blue flannel
the color of the sky
for it was the clearest day
with white puffy clouds and
birds squawking everywhere.

III

It used to frighten me,
this separation among our species.
In the trailer over there
through the plastic
a woman is knocked against the paneling
for the sixth time, and blood
begins to dry above her right ear.
But I am not afraid. The crickets
sit here with me, and sometimes form
a circle just above the mossy slate,
and my smooth rock, made smooth long ago
when rocks were part of daily living.
And the fireflies dazzling the soybean fields.
Skylab is supposed to fall to Earth tonight,
somewhere in Australia. But you never know,
except that it's out there and
coming this way. No, I'm not waiting for it.
I'm trying to just be. My rock.
The darkness.
Look at that moon!
You leaving already?
It is unusually fine
to be with you.

MotherNotes for Elaine

"I keep forgetting things," I told one of my students,
"sometimes I can't even remember
what I've been saying
a few seconds before.
Is it cuz I'm getting old?"

"No," she said
"it's because the mind thinks parallel thoughts,
we rarely think one thing at a time."

"So that's it," I said as I saw
the P.S. 128 anthology still unedited,
snowpants my son still needs,
a strange fast-talking man
from a dream I can't quite reach,
chicken or sausage
for my sweet or sour husband,
Mother leaving me alone in the car for hours
in Schuster's parking lot (did she ask
the attendant to keep an eye on me?)—
all *that* stretched across my mind
like lines in a music-paper notebook,
chords and chimes that can't chime
cuz like a class full of children
they're all ringing at once—

what I need is
a one-note solo, not lines
but a dot the size of
and as interesting as
a clitoris—
(when you play with yourself
all imagery and action
move toward one goal)

so during these blessed 20 minutes
between picking my son up at the babysitter
and macaroni & cheese for dinner
let me crouch down
undistracted
unrefracted
in my peanut-shell chair
tiny and folded
like an unborn child
to write this poem . . .

PEGGY GARRISON

MARILYN HACKER BALLAD OF LADIES LOST & FOUND

for Julia Alvarez

Where are the women who, *entre deux guerres*,
came out on college-graduation trips,
came to New York on football scholarships,
came to town meeting in a decorous pair?
Where are the expatriate *salonnières*,
the gym-teacher, the math-department head?
Do nieces follow where their odd aunts led?
The elephants die off in Cagnes-sur-Mer.
H.D., whose "nature was bisexual,"
and plain old Margaret Fuller died as well.

Where are the single-combat champions:
the Chevalier d'Eon with curled peruke,
Big Sweet, who ran with Zora in the jook,
open-handed Winifred Ellerman,
Colette, who hedged her bets and always won?
Sojourner's sojourned where she need not pack
decades of whitegirl conscience on her back.
The spirit gave up Zora; she lay down
under a weed-field miles from Eatonville,
and plain old Margaret Fuller died as well.

Where's Stevie, with her pleated schoolgirl dresses,
and Rosa, with her permit to wear pants?
Who snuffed Clara's *mestiza* flamboyance
and bled Frida onto her canvasses?
Where are the Niggerati hostesses,
the kohl-eyed ivory poets with severe
chignons, the rebels who grew out their hair,
the bulldaggers with marcelled processes?
Conglomerates co-opted Sugar Hill,
and plain old Margaret Fuller died as well.

Anne Hutchinson, called witch, termagant, whore,
died of the flu, having escaped the noose.
Carolina María de Jesus'
tale from the slagheaps of the landless poor
ended on a straw mat on a dirt floor.
In action thirteen years after fifteen
in prison, Eleanor of Aquitaine
accomplished half of Europe and fourscore
anniversaries for good or ill,
and plain old Margaret Fuller died as well.

Has Ida B. persuaded Susan B.
to pool resources for a joint campaign?
(Two Harriets act a pageant by Lorraine,
cheered by the butch drunk on the IRT
who used to watch me watch her watching me;
We've notes by Angelina Grimké Weld
for choral settings drawn from the *Compiled
Poems* of Angelina Weld Grimké.)
There's no such tense as Past Conditional,
and plain old Margaret Fuller died as well.

Who was Sappho's protegee, and when did
we lose Hrotsvitha, dramaturge and nun?
What did bibulous Suzanne Valadon
think about Artemisia, who tended
to make a lifesize murderess look splendid?
Where's Aphra, fond of dalliance and the pun?
Where's Jane, who didn't indulge in either one?
Whoever knows how Ende, Pintrix, ended
is not teaching Art History at Yale,
and plain old Margaret Fuller died as well.

Has Rosa Parks a limousine to sit in
and chat with Juana Inés de la Cruz?
Where's *savante* Anabella, Augusta-Goose,
Fanny, Maude, Lidian, Freda and Caitlin,
"without whom this could never have been written?"
Louisa, who wrote, scrimped, saved, sewed, and nursed,
Malinche, who's, like all translators, cursed,
Bessie, whose voice was hemp and steel and satin,
outside a segregated hospital,
and plain old Margaret Fuller died as well.

Where's Amy, who kept Ada in cigars
and love, requited, both country and courtly,
although quinquagenarian and portly?
Where's Emily? It's very still upstairs.
Where's Billie, whose strange fruit ripened in bars,
where's the street-scavenging Little Sparrow?
Too poor, too mean, too weird, too wide, too narrow:
Marie Curie, examining her scars,
was not particularly beautiful;
and plain old Margaret Fuller died as well.

Who was the grandmother of Frankenstein?
The Vindicatrix of the Rights of Woman.
Madame de Sévigné said prayers to summon
the postman just as eloquent as mine,
though my Madame de Grignan's only nine.
But Mary Wollstonecraft had never known
that daughter, nor did Paula Modersohn.
The three-day infants blinked in the sunshine.
The mothers turned their faces to the wall;
and plain old Margaret Fuller died as well.

Tomorrow night the harvest moon will wane
that's floodlighting the silhouetted wood.
Make your own footnotes; it will do you good.
Emeritae have nothing to explain.
She wasn't very old, or really plain—
my age exactly, volumes incomplete.
"The life, the life, will it never be sweet?"
She wrote it once; I quote it once again
midlife at midnight when the moon is full
and I can almost hear the warning bell
offshore, sounding through starlight like a stain
on waves that heaved over what she began
and truncated a woman's chronicle,
and plain old Margaret Fuller died as well.

GLORIA

EN EL NOMBRE DE TODAS LAS MADRES QUE HAN PERDIDO SUS HIJOS EN LA GUERRA: UN CUENTO

Le cubro su cabecita, mi criatura con sus piesecitos fríos. Aquí lo tendre acurrucado en mis brazos hasta que me muera. Parece años que estoy sentada aquí en este charco de sangre. Estó pasó ésta mañana.

Cuando oí ese tiroteo se me paro la sangre. Con el niño dormido en mis brazos corri pa' fuera. Trosos de tierra se levantaban, bolaban por todos rumbos. Pedazos de ramas caían como lluvia, una lluvia colorada. Fue cuando vi a mis vecinos caer heridos, la sangre chirispitiando en mis brazos, cayendo a su carita.

Vi unos soldados pecho a tierra disparando sus rifles y más allá vi unos hombres armados con metraladoras. Disparaban a la gente y a los jacaes. Cerca de mis pies la balacera rompía la tierra. Detrás de mí sentí mi jacal echar fuego y un calor fuerte me avento adelante. Sentí tres golpes en el pecho, uno tras de otro, y vi los agujeros en su camiseta.

Sentí que el niño apretó su manita, la que tenía alrededor de mi dedo gordo. Sangre saltó como agua aventada de una cubeta. Cayó pintando las piedras y las uñas de mis patas. Quien hubiera creído que un chiquitio cargara tanta sangre. Todo mundo olía a sangre. Madre dios, quien habra cometido este mal?

Con un pedazo de mi falda, le limpio su carita salpicada de sangre. Ay, Madre dios, miro que en un ojo le cuelga y que el otro no párparea. Ay mijito, no pude atajarte la muerte. Un duelo me sube como una fiebre. Quien curara a mi hijo?

Mojo su cuerpecito. Entre su pavico meto su intestino. Aplico a sus ojos agua fría. Pongo su ojito izquierdo en su cuenca pero se sale y se resvala por su cachete. Limpio la sangre en sus parpados. Soplo sobre su cabecita, soplo sobre las cuevas en su cuerpecito. Nueve veces soplo. Sane, mi hijo, sane.

Que voy hacer, Madre dios? No siente alivio mi enfermito. De aquí no me muevo, en éste rincón de mi tierra me quedo, aquí que me abandone mi destino. Aquí me quedo hasta que mi hijo se haga polvo. Aquí sentada, viendo mis gruesos callos en las plantas de los pies, aquí viendo mis sandalias de hule manchadas con su sangre. Aquí espantando los moscos y viendo las sombras cuajadas de sangre me quedo. Aquí me quedo hasta que me pudra. Toda la noche lo arrullo en mis brazos. Saco la chiche, se la arrimo a su boquita quebrada, pero el nunca ha de beber. El día amanece, vivo a ver otro amanecer, que extraño.

ANZALDÚA

IN THE NAME OF ALL THE MOTHERS WHO HAVE LOST CHILDREN IN THE WAR

translated from the Spanish by the author

I cover his little head. My child with his cold small feet. I will hold him here curled up in my arms until I die. It seems like years that I've been sitting here in this pool of blood. It happened this morning.

When I heard the putt putt of the shots the blood froze in my veins. I ran outside with the child sleeping in my arms. Chunks of dirt rose in the air, flew in all directions. Bits of branches fell like rain—a rust colored rain. That's when I saw my neighbors fall wounded, saw blood splash on my arms, saw it fall on his little face.

I saw soldiers on the ground firing their rifles, and beyond them, men armed with machine guns. They were shooting at the people and at our huts. Shots tore the earth near my feet. Back of me I felt my hut catch fire, an intense heat pushing me forward. I felt something hit me in the chest, one blow after the other. Then I saw the holes in his little shirt.

I felt my son's fist tighten, the one around my thumb. Blood flew out like water thrown from a bucket. It painted the rocks and the nails on my feet. Who would have thought that such a small child could carry so much blood? Everything reeked of blood and gunpowder. *Madre dios*, who has committed this harm?

With the corner of my skirt I clean his face pockmarked with blood. Ay, *Madre dios*, I see that one of his eyes hangs out and the other does not blink. Little son, I could not intercept death for you. Pain rises in me like a fever. Who will cure my son?

I moisten his small body. Into his diaper I put his intestine, apply cold water to his eyes. I replace his left eyeball into its socket but it pops out and slides down his cheek. I clean the blood from his eyelashes. I blow my breath all over his head, blow over the holes in his body. Nine times I blow. Heal, my son, heal.

What am I going to do, *Madre dios*? My sick one is not getting better. I will not move from here, in this corner of my land I will stay. Let destiny abandon me here. Here I will remain until my son turns to dust. I sit here, looking at the thick calluses on the soles of my feet, staring at my blood-spotted rubber sandals. I'll stay here chasing away the flies, staring at the shadows coagulating in the blood. Here I will remain till I rot. All night I rock him in my arms. I take out my breast, hold it to his small broken mouth. But he will never suck again. Daylight comes, I live to see another sunrise, how strange.

Tiendo al niño boca abajo en mis piernas. Le tapo su cara, cubro sus huesitos rompídos. Me fijo pa' arriba al cielo. Busco su alma. Alma de miijo, venga aquí a mis piernas. Plumita ensangrada, devuelva de los cinco destinos. Mi venerable criatura que no temía a nada, que nunca lloraba, ni cuando se le acerco la muerte. Quiero saber si ha perdido el alma. Aquí en mis nalgas su cuerpecito, cada hora más frío.

Te invoco Madre dios, mujer de nuestro sustento. Que querías que hiciera, Madre mia? Soy una pobre meztisa. A mi hijo no le tocaba, no todavía no. Estos agujeros en su pecho, ésto no es su destino. Aquí me tiro en la tierra soy sólo un quejido. Le pido que alivie a mi hijo, que devuelva su alma. Que culpa tiene una criatura. Si, Madre dios, yo trate de proteger a mis hijos. Al mayor lo mataron en el llano. Alsegundo lo mataron en el cerro. Y el mes pasado mataron a mi hija en el monte. Ayá se les acabo su destino. Ya nomás me quedaba el chiquio, éste que esta aquí cubrido con mi falda. Si, éste de piesecitos fríos. Madre dios, quiero matar a todo hombre que hace guerra, que quiebra, que acaba con la vida. Ésta guerra me ha quitado todo. Todo es culpa del blanco invasor, esos extranjeros que arman a la gente. Que han echo con mi tierra? P' que hacemos niños, pa' que les damos la vida. Para que sean masacrados? Para que los blancos se burlen de la gente? En sus ojos la gente indigena y meztisa son peores que animales.

Mire como se me esta enfriando mi hijo. Hijito, por que te quitaron la vida antes de que aprendieras a andar? Ésta pestilencia, la guerra, me ha quitado todo. Ésta enfermedad colorada convierte todo a gusano. De lugares romotos viene este ataque contra el pueblo.

Me quiero morir, Madre dios, que vengan mas balas. Aquí tirenme al corazon. El resto de mi ya esta muerto. Madre dios, le suplico en el nombre de todas las madres que han perdido hijos en la guerra. Madre dios, le pido que vaya tras de su alma, busquelo, recogelo.

I lay my child face down on my lap, cover his head, cover his broken bones. I look up into the heavens, search for his soul. Soul of my son, come here to this lap. Small bloodied feather, come back from the five destinies. Oh my poor venerable child, you were never afraid, you never cried, no, not even when death approached you. I want to know if he has lost his soul. Here on my inner skirt his little body gets colder every hour.

I invoke you, Mother god, Lady of Our Sustenance. What did you want me to do? I am a poor *meztisa*. His time had not come, no not yet. These holes in his chest are not his destiny. Here I will throw myself on the ground, I who am merely a groan. I entreat you to heal my son, to return his soul. What fault can a child have. Yes, *Madre dios*, I tried to protect my children. They killed my oldest in the open field. The second was killed in the hill. And last month in the woods they shot my daughter. Their destiny ended out there. I was left only with this one, this little piece of my flesh, the flesh I pushed out into the world – this *thing* here, covered with my skirt.

Madre dios, I want to kill every man that makes war, that breaks life, that ends life. This war has taken everything from me. Why make sons and daughters, why give them life? So that they can be massacred? Ay, those white ones that mock us, what have they done with my land. These foreigners that arm the people, in their eyes we're animals. Yes, to them we Indians and people of mixed blood are worse than animals. Fodder, that's what we are to them.

Look, see how my child is getting colder. Oh, my son, why did they take your life before you could learn to walk. You had just begun to move your feet in the air. This sickness, war, has taken everything from me. This red pestilence converts everything into maggots. Yes, this attack on my people comes from a distant place.

I want to die, *Madre dios*. Let the bullets find my heart. The rest of me is already dead. Mother god, I beseech you in the name of all the mothers who have lost children in the war. I ask you, *Madre dios*, to go after his soul, look for it, gather it to you.

contributors

MEENA ALEXANDER: I was born in India in 1951 and raised there and in North Africa; I was educated in England and returned to India in 1973 to teach and write poetry. I am involved with the women's movement in India and my poems are published in the feminist journal *Manushi*. In this country my poems have appeared in *New Letters*, *Greenfield Review*, and the special women's issues of *River Styx* and *The Journal of South Asian Literature*. My last volume of poetry was *Stone Roots* (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1980). I live in New York City and am putting together a new volume of poetry. I am struggling to write about my experiences as an Indian woman in this country.

MARIA THEREZA ALVES is a Brazilian artist and writer presently living in New York. She founded the Brazilian Information Center and was recently awarded the Academy of American Poets Prize at the Cooper Union, where she is a senior. She has also been awarded a fellowship for younger poets at Bucknell University.

GLORIA ANZALDÚA is a Chicana poet from "el valle" in south Texas whose writing reflects her Mexican, Indian, and lesbian feminist roots. She teaches writing at Vermont College and Women's Voices Writing Workshop (Santa Cruz.)

EDNA BENNETT has been writing about photography since the early '50s and taking pictures a good deal longer. Since leaving the Columbia School of Journalism in 1928, photography and writing have been her life. Having worked as a professional portrait, architectural and illustrations photographer, a photographer's representative, and editor of *U.S. Camera Magazine* and *U.S. Camera Annual*, she now lives at the extreme end of eastern Long Island, close to the beaches and brambles.

CAROLE BOVOSO is a poet and author whose forthcoming book, *Foremothers*, is to be published by Summit Books. She is the editor and founder of *Letters* magazine which has been publishing since 1974. She tries to go to Egypt every year.

BETH BRANT is a contributing editor to IKON. Her book of prose, *Mohawk Trail*, will be published by Firebrand Books in the Spring. "Born in 1941, A Taurus with Scorpio rising. I am a lesbian mother, a writer, a believer in magic signs and people. I'm a Bay of Quinte Mohawk, the editor of *A Gathering of Spirit*, writing and art by North American Indian women (which is in its 2nd expanded printing as a book from Sinister Wisdom). This excerpt is from a novel I have been working on for a year. It is about the city of Detroit, whose people I love passionately."

BARBARA CAMERON: Granddaughter of Henry.

ENID DAME has published poems in *Confrontation*, *13th Moon*, and *Conditions*; her latest book of poems is *Confessions* (1982). With the poet Donald Lev, she co-edits *Home Planet News*, a literary tabloid. She teaches writing at Rutgers University and lives in Brooklyn.

DAVINE is Associate Editor of IKON. "I attempt to shatter myths, expose "personal" tragedies that are political in basis, to remind ourselves that whatever "it" is, it is not just happening to US. We'd better examine who is responsible and why, so we can join each other in the elimination of OUR oppression, instead of being embarrassed, ashamed, and so—vulnerable. As a Black person, and as a woman, I refuse to be silenced by my 'condition.' "

NANCY DEAN is a teacher in the CUNY system. Under the name Elizabeth Lang, she has published a short story, "The Gathering" in *Room of One's Own* and a novel, *Anna's Country* (Naiad Press) which has recently been translated into German as *Anna*. She has written a novella, a collection of short stories and is just now finishing a play.

MYRIAM DÍAZ-DIO CARETZ is a contributing editor to IKON. Born in 1951 in Chile, she now lives in Holland. Poet, critic, translator, Ph.D. in Comparative Literature, her work has appeared in several magazines including *13th Moon*, *Letras Femeninas*, *Third Woman*, as well as other journals in Spain, Latin America, and the U.S. She is the author of *Que no se pueden decir*. Her book of poetry in translation, *Adrienne Rich: Poemas 1951-1981* will appear soon in Spain (Visor).

KATHY ENGEL is a poet whose work has been published in many magazines including the *Iowa Review*, *Pequod*, and *Poetry East*. She is the director of MADRE, a friendship association with women and children in Central America and the Caribbean. MADRE's current project is organizing a drive to support the Bertha Calderon Women's Hospital in Managua.

SUZANNE GARDINIER is a lesbian poet born in New Bedford in 1961 and raised in Scituate, Massachusetts. She is currently an embattled student in the Writing Division at Columbia University and teaches at P.S. 75 with the Teachers and Writers Collaborative. These are her first published poems.

PEGGY GARRISON's poetry and fiction have appeared in *The South Dakota Review*, *Poetry Now*, *Choice*, *The Village Voice*, *The Smith*, *Ball State University Forum*, *Center* and *The Wormwood Review*. She has worked in poets-in-the-schools programs in Delaware, Pennsylvania and New York and is presently at work on a book of stories about people from Milwaukee (her hometown).

JANICE GOULD is Maidu Indian, a poet, and a lesbian. She currently works as a secretary. She lives in Berkeley, California and her work has been published in *A Gathering of Spirit* (a special issue of *Sinister Wisdom*) and *Bearing Witness*.

ROBERTA GOULD has published two books of poems, *Dream Yourself Flying* and *Writing Air, Written Water; Only Rock* is seeking a publisher. She was the editor of *Light: A Poetry Review* from 1973 to 1980. *Punch Drunk and Other Poems*, written in August after a serious accident, will appear soon. She says to all bicyclists, "... wear a helmet, wear a helmet!"

JUDY GRAHN has been active in the Gay movement for the past twenty years as a poet, publisher, and organizer. One of the foremost voices of Lesbian/feminism, her works include *The Common Woman Poems*, *Edward the Dyke*, and *The Queen of Wands*. One of her latest books is *Another Mother Tongue: Gay Words, Gay Worlds*, published by Beacon Press. She teaches Gay and Lesbian studies in San Francisco.

MARILYN HACKER is the author of *Taking Notice* (Knopf, 1980), *Separations* (Knopf, 1976), and *Presentation Piece* (Viking, 1974), a Lamont Poetry Selection of the Academy of American Poets and winner of the National Book Award in poetry for 1975. Her new collection, *Assumptions*, will be published by Knopf in the spring of 1985. She lives in New York City and is editor of the feminist literary magazine *13th Moon*, for which she recently received a CCLM Editor's Grant.

GALE JACKSON is a writer and a librarian who lives in Brooklyn. She is working as an organizer with *Art Against Apartheid*.

MARISELA LA GRAVE has been a photographer for ten years. As an independent video and filmmaker, she has produced a video piece on the Seneca Women's Peace Encampment (1983), a film of West German demonstrations in protest of Pershing II deployment (1983), and a television program on colonial and U.S. intervention in Central America and the Caribbean (1984).

AUDRE LORDE, Black, lesbian, feminist poet is a Poet and Professor of English at Hunter College. Her most recent books include *The Cancer Journals* (Spinsters Ink) which received a 1981 Book Award from the American Library Association Gay Caucus; *Zami*, a biomythography, and *Sister Outsider*, a collection of essays and speeches (Crossing Press); and *Chosen Poems—Old and New* (W.W. Norton). Her third book of poetry, *From A Land Where Other People Live* (Broadside Press) was nominated for the National Book Award in 1974.

JUDITH McDANIEL is a poet and novelist who lives in Albany, NY. She believes recovery from all addiction to be revolutionary and is working to include recovery in the feminist struggle. Her novel *Winter Passage* was published by Spinsters Ink in 1984.

COLLEEN McKAY is the staff photographer for IKON. She began her study of photography in Los Angeles in the early 1970s where she was one of the founders of the Los Angeles Women's Saloon. She has had her photographs published in numerous journals, magazines, and newspapers including *Off Our Backs*, *Womanews*, *New Women's Times*, *Cultural Correspondence*, *La Vie En Rouge*, and *The New York Times Book Review*.

TERRI MEYETTE is a member of the Yaqui Tribe, a lesbian, a poet and an artist. She is presently serving time in Santa Maria prison in Arizona.

VALERIE MINER's novels include *Blood Sisters*, *Movement*, *Murder in the English Department* and *Geary Street* (forthcoming). Her reviews and essays have appeared in *The New York Times*, *Sinister Wisdom*, *Saturday Review*, *Ms.*, *The Economist*, *The Los Angeles Times* and many other journals. She teaches at U.C. Berkeley.

MINNIE BRUCE PRATT is the lesbian mother of two teen-age boys. Her first book of poetry was *The Sound of One Fork*, and she is currently working on her second book of poetry, *We Say We Love Each Other*. Her essay, "Identity Skin Blood Heart" is included in *Yours in Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism*.

MIRTHA N. QUINTANALES is Cuban-born, an anthropologist, writer and co-founder of Third World Women's Archives in New York City. She is presently completing her dissertation on the political radicalization of Cuban women in the U.S. and working on a collection of short stories. She is planning to go into writing and directing films.

MARGARET RANDALL, born in the United States, lived in Mexico, Cuba and Nicaragua for over twenty years. Her many books of poetry and non-fiction include *Sandino's Daughters* (New Star Books) and *Risking a Somersault in the Air: Conversations with Nicaraguan Poets and Writers* (Solidarity Publications). A collection of her photographs of women in Latin and North America accompanied by women's texts will be published by Crossing Press in April. Currently living in New Mexico, she is working on a book about re-entry called *Albuquerque*, and will be teaching a course on "Women & Creativity" in the Women's Studies Program at the University of New Mexico. She is a contributing editor to IKON.

RUTHANN ROBSON is an attorney interested in feminist issues and lives near the beach in Florida. She is a contributing editor to *KALLIOPE: A Journal of Women's Art* and to *NEW PAGES: News and Reviews of the Progressive Book Trade*.

VICKIE SEARS: "I'm Cherokee, a lesbian, a writer. I'm 41, living in Seattle, and have been writing since I was six."

SUSAN SHERMAN, the editor of IKON, also edited the first series (1966-69). She has just completed a new manuscript of poems and prose, *The Color of the Heart*.

NANCY SWISHER is a 1983 CAPS recipient in poetry. Presently, she is working on a production for the Poet's Theatre of Provincetown. She is from New Creek, West Virginia. This is her first publication.

NELLIE WONG was born and raised in Oakland, California. Her book of poems, *Dreams in Harrison Railroad Park*, was published by Kelsey Street Press. A long-time secretary, Wong will be visiting professor in Women's Studies at the University of Minnesota in the spring of 1985. Active in Radical Women, a socialist feminist organization, Wong's work has appeared in *Heresies*, *13th Moon*, *Conditions*, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color*, *Echoes from Gold Mountain*, *Breaking Silence: An Anthology of Asian American Poets*, *Hanging Loose*, and *Working Classics*, among others.