

DIASPORIC LITERATURE

30 JULY, 2010 | CREATED USING FIVEFILTERS.ORG

Baby Watching

Oct 26, 2009 10:59AM

His charcoal-blue eyes burn for knowledge,
they sift the world in fragments,
between the bars of the cot he sees half a mother,
her hand reaching the door knob
again her silent escape when the music still plays
those ponderous notes
– the room now holds one breath,
he can turn this into a cry and bring her back,
he can turn over and stop destiny's growth,
he can search among the room's shadows
which one holds the map, the puzzle, the key?

The things he's supposed to know –
the sounds have all walked away,
the sobbing, the snoring, talking in loud whispers,
all the clues to find love –
above his head, the cot is pasted like a prison cell,
the rainbow spider sways in and out of the bars,
the bed which holds the midnight tangle
is boxed and waiting, the curtains allow daylight
one step in, the mirror finds another baby,
this one is smaller with eyes ready to gulp
the room's slightest tremble, any sign of her return?

The mirror's blankets begin to fight like starving animals,
he watches a mouth tear out its lungs
and make a sound slashing the room's contents
away from the teddy bear cuddles,
big shadows have marched in, carrying scissors and forceps,
now he must cry louder than his double
for her heart to break in, rock him back to liquid love,
he stops – there is that smell to melt all shadows,
her arms, her breasts, the perfect bed.

(First published in *Malleable Jangle*, online literary journal and in poetry collection *Honey and Salt*, Five Islands Press 2007.)

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The Blood Rose and the Artichoke Heart

Sep 22, 2009 01:55AM

(for my Grandfather, Pappou Angeli)

Epping: 20 stations too far from the city,
where trains screech, *The end of the line!*
(passengers prefer not to get off)
where factory workers starve,
where paddocks harvest wild thistles, horned weeds
(daisy-fed cows are extinct)
snakes graze, skinks bask, flies pester in gangs,
where I scramble in towering, tough grass
straggling behind *Pappou's* haste
behind his will to capture the hearts and limbs
of every artichoke daring to raise its head
above his scraggy-pup, whining granddaughter.

Pappou th-e boro, Pappou I'm tired
my body fixes on excuses
Pappou toilette, Pappou
knotting my legs tighter than shoelaces
Pappou teleeoresee, Pappou!
I'll miss *Neighbours* with *Charlene*
and her easy way with English
but grass turns to blue as I slump into sobs
wishing artichokes would go back
to *Pappou's* foreign land.
Pappou is swishing and swerving
dancing the wind
dropping his jaw he sings:
Etsee een ee-zoe, kai pos na teen alaxees
pos na teen xerapees me moleevee kai hartee
hacking air with a chicken knife
ghosts fall at his feet
alle klaine, kai alle yellane thilathee.
Spiky flowers line up
not daring to jig
they've been waiting patiently
anginares moo, my artichokes,
holding them like a lost beloved,
their prickles are his delight.

I hold two buckets and he a third
while he performs a murderous embrace
with one arm and a sharpened blade
he croons unswerving love.
Mia fora kai yio, eeba na feeyo
abo toos kaeimoos, yia na xefeeyo...
...in my village of sweetness and light
there was a girl not that much older than you
krata moo to hairee, krata to barabono moo...
...one day you'll learn
carobs she plucked from trees

*squeezing their juice
the sweet smell of blood rose
the savoury trail of artichoke heart
our honey and salt...
...krata teen karthia soo os boo nartee to broee.*

I have no hanky for his eyes,
I have no words to soothe.
Pappou has no time to linger
there are crowns to be guillotined
there's one bucket empty of heads;
Pappou continues this easy war
he's now cornered the big one
the crown of all thorns
the most sorrowful hearted
anginara moo, my artichoke,
saliva running as hungry as memory.
I packed my yearnings, left my regrets,
she stood at the doorway refusing to wave...
when his *Mama* tucked him into her warmth
feeding him the growth of her land
butterfly kissing his stabs of hunger.

For its biggest blessing
he raises his knife to the heavens,
I wait for blinding light, electric storm, rain
but a scream drenches all weeds,
like a plane, he crashes,
red roses spread over his arms,
the knife his embattled betrayer,
anginara moo, my artichoke...
Pappou's song hobbling into prayer
on his knees, ankle to stem, blood mingling

Pappou? Pappou

— his eyes my mirrors
my hand grasps for the strong fingers
— lighter than petals in the wind.

(From poetry collection **Honey and Salt**, Five Islands Press 2007)



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Calliope's Final Story

Sep 14, 2009 12:38AM

(for my paternal and maternal grandmothers)

Long ago, we grew babies like markets stock fruit
so many, splendid, ripe, bruised.
A mother nursed her garden from bed,
five cots, if lucky, for eight or nine.
One bosom became the village well □
a wandering creek or waterfall
suddenly escaped our flesh,
a steady river gushed into a suckling mouth
□ to silence twelve cries, and then more
when the neighbour's wife went missing.

We named them after patron saints
to please eternal life and stop it from snatching
until their bodies were ringed like trees
so ready to sigh away.

We knew the story before it was told
from grandma to mother to us
of one, two, so unfair, if more
wrapped in dark night's blanket
taken by sleep traveller to its side of the moon.

If traveller was an angel,
my baby was blessed.

If traveller was the vampire,
baby's baptism dress was buried
under a cross twice its size.

If traveller wore gypsy clothes,
I would pray baby a better life.

My grandma lost three,
mother streamed luck, only the one:
little sister dream-kissed our cheeks
then flew into her angel's wings.
My seven grew into five,
the two curves of my heart are missing...

some memories, like some babies, clutch stronger than others.

(First published in Wet Ink, Western Australian literary journal,
and in poetry collection Honey and Salt, Five Islands Press 2007)

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