

Songs of My Grandmother

Trinity Herr



SONGS OF MY GRANDMOTHER

I.

In the kitchen I sing old country songs.
 Mama comes, stands in the doorway,
 says: *you remind me of my mother,*
 says: *you have the Indian looks, you know,*
 says: *not everyone sings sadness with strength.*
 She leaves when I pour flour on the possumbelly.
 I'm crazy for feeling so lonely.

II.

I know that it wasn't God who made honky-tonk angels
 like my grandmother, eyes beaten same black-blue
 as our Mandan hair in neon and bar smoke

by one of the men who made me white.
 Montana, those days,
 only people hated more than prairie niggers
 were the pair of Puerto Ricans who didn't kill Truman.

III.

I'm always walking after midnight searching for myself,
 but the sky is not big here like the dirt I came from.
 I am told that Portland is a beautiful city,
 but it reeks of weed or paper mills &
 you cannot see the stars if you try
 to look up. At these times, I think
 of night driving from Virginia City to Helena,
 my arm out the window, the hot rain skin,
 watching white lightning expand my view for miles.

IV.

My grandfather couldn't spell schizophrenia.
 Couldn't afford it either. So he drank cheaper medicine &
 spoke his illness with fists. That pair of ugly drunks,
 the worthless Injun girl with no father &
 the troubled horse thief son of a murderer,
 I feel their legacy coiled around me
 like a winter nest of rattlesnakes.
 The weight of our problems is sixteen tons,
 & whiskey burns like the hell we're driving to
 seated in the back of a Cadillac.

V.

I am only told the good things of the past;
 even then the words are prairie grass whispers.
 The bread recipe I use belonged to other girls
 with long dark hair & deep set eyes before me.
 It is one of the good things.
 The white dough does not color when you punch it.
 What can stick to flour coated hands?



Trinity Herr dropped out of college before she could learn how to spell MFA. Her work has previously appeared at *Hobart Online* and in *Juxtapose Magazine*. She is also a founding editor of *Cascadia Rising Review*. Trinity currently lives in Western Oregon and works at the hospital where she was born.



