

ALIENS AT THE BORDER



THE WRITING WORKSHOP

Bedford Hills Correctional Facility

Edited with an Introduction by Hettie Jones

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Judith Clark

Why?

because I could not live
in the world as it was
because I did not want to be
what I was born for
because I careened between
hope and despair
because my eyes saw what others denied
and were blind to what was
right in front of me
because I felt a terrible only
and wanted to burst open into my molecules
among everyone else's molecules
because I wanted to be invisible
because I wanted to be known
because I wanted to crawl
like a snake, out of my skin
and into another's, at least
for one lifetime
because I felt weak and afraid
and wanted to dare courage into me

After My Arrest

among the everyday
pieces lost
a bright pink Indian cotton shirt

worn through months of
nursing, quickly unbuttoned
to bring the rooting baby to my breast
her head in its
soft, filmy folds

set adrift among the debris
of police searches, overturned lives
tossed into a pile of orphaned clothes
and taken to a tag sale

where my friend,
recognizing it,
bought it
to keep me close

and wore it one day
to bring my daughter for a visit,
greeting me cheerfully,
"Remember this?"

and I laughed,
scooping up my baby
to carry her into the toy-filled playroom
where she rode me, her horsey
among the oversized stuffed animals
until visiting hours were over

when I stood at that great divide,
the visitor's exit gate,
and watched my shirt and my child
leave
with my friend

JUDITH CLARK

"Something in the girl is waking"

—*Lucille Clifton*

the way the air parts as she walks
the way she looks me in the eye
the way the boys eye her
and men pause

for a heartbeat

the shadow she casts
on city streets
claiming my old haunts as her own

apart all her life, yet joined
she visits, full of hugs
and adventures

once my cherished moon
now a shooting star,
brilliant, hot,
bursting open

God creating
her own universe

This Is How You Smile At Those You Don't Like

Let me see you try
Hush! Don't object
do as I say
Do what they say
Smile
No No No
that's not a smile, that's a sneer
You mustn't ever sneer
at them
at the men
at anyone
in authority
Don't sneer
Don't talk back
Don't contradict
Don't argue with me
Don't argue with them
Close your mouth
gnats will fly in
words will fly out
I see them now
on the tip of your tongue
dangerous words
rebellious words
loud, unladylike,
censorious
words

Close your mouth
Stop grinding your teeth
Don't poke out your chin
Lower your eyes
they beam too hard
turn up the ends of your mouth
That's it—
SMILE!

Vernal Equinox

in memory of Selma Ward

whiplashed rain
pounds the
battered ground
weeping trees
stern fences

unmoved by
our shocked, disbelieving faces

one moment she is among us
wise-cracking Madonna
angry child of God
singing her hopes
to Jesus,
conning, cunning,
always up-to-something

leaving us
in a wake of curses
hurled at the hapless
C.O. who couldn't
get her to a doctor

sent to disciplinary
—wouldn't work
too sick—
a short detour
but she never
returned

just a Captain and Chaplain
with long faces
short on answers

outside
the wind howls
and furious raindrops
whirl in the glare
of a searchlight

I open my window
to let in the cold
wet wind
but it can't clear
this fouled air
shrouding us

Out

I want to go out
to a beach
shadowed by windswept dunes
the ocean crashing
salt spray on my face

I want to run wild
across bridges heading from
hard city streets to wide open spaces
run till my lungs
scream, my heart breaks
into a howling roar that
thrills every fox, bear, coyote,
orphaned fawn, she wolf who's lost her young
every wild animal left
in this hunted, stripped,
fenced-in land

I want to dance with fire
I want to float through waterfalls
I want to rub my face in
pine-scented moss
hunt mushrooms under
towering firs

I want to be free

Storm

blow me from

here
on this road that leads nowhere

blow down these bricks
that tower
that machine gun man
clocking
my ups and downs
this molehill mountain

lift me
over the long-faced buildings
the yard with inward-facing benches
the cruel, cutting concertina

blow me
far
from this
still-life landscape

blow, storm
blow me
away
from
here