



An Empty House After Sleep, After Rain

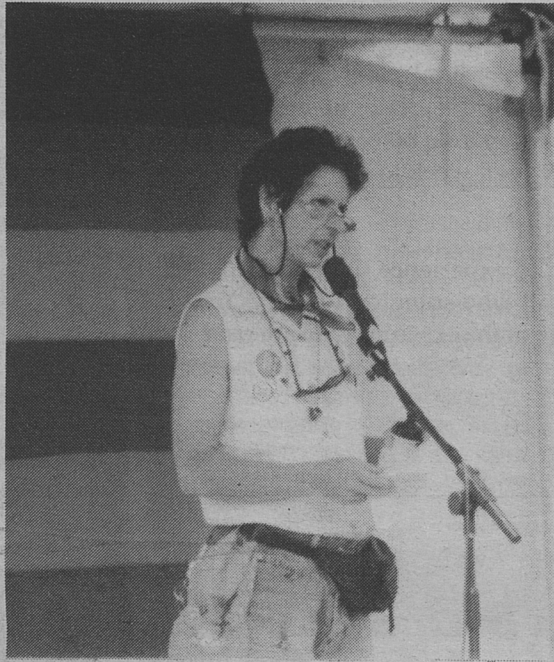
At dusk, the sun sits
just above the hills
as the shade of the hemlock lies
across my bed. Sunday.
The house is silent.
Chickadees and cardinals praise
the rain. The honeysuckle
seems to have bloomed overnight—
their scent seeps from the windowsill,
explores the room. I am weak
from a day of lifting rocks
from the garden, raking leaves
too wet to burn. All the screens
still in the windows, rain
has sifted in. I do not rush
from these minutes after sleep.
I am listening to the calm pouring
of the spout and thinking
of a friend who says the world
is near its end—love does not exist
and God has left what he created.
I call to my cats, but I am sure
they are asleep, curled deep
in the hamper in the bathroom.
I hear the backdoor open and close
and the squeak of wet sneakers
against the kitchen linoleum.
I know that love exists. I know it
like this old house with all its moans
and creaks; like the breeze and the dusk
turning from me; the wet green,
and the birds searching for worms
after the rain.

— Jeff Walt

photo by Scot Applegate



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Madge

O' Madge my soapy goddess,
O' Nymph with the ageless hands,
If time is to throw you in its Hefty bag
And pass you over for immortality,
Just remember, that it is not me.
When you smile I melt and scream,
Words of love and cleanlines.
It's not because the dishes need washing,
Every day I wash them thinking of you.
Perhaps, someday you will dry, and I will wash,
And someday I will dry watching your beautiful
hands
Dive and sink like two hungry seabirds in love.
A Rosie by any other name is still
Just Rhoda's mother to me,
No comparison to you, Madge.
You taught us clean counters are useless
When cleaned by wrinkled hands.
And if you are lost down history's drain,
I will remember,
Mr. Whipple, Aunt Jamima, Betty Crocker,
Are just names but you are a beacon,
Like the light in the back of the refrigerator,
Always there when I need to be guided
Through the endless shelves of life.
Countless are those you have helped
With your Palmolive words of wisdom,
So many housewives can face their lives
With soft, supple hands.
And Madge,
Just one more thing,
I'm soaking in it.

— Constance Craving

Crone Poem: Who She Will Be

She would also have to be harsh,
astringent, acrid as woodsmoke

far-sighted, flint-hard, sharp
as a razor

She would have to have a harsh tongue
As well, unsparing,
be skilled in the uses of bitter herbs
caustic cures,
willow and yarrow, nettles,
nightshade

She would rise at the foot of the orchard,
clear as October, tart as vinegar,
an apple-green tang
like a girl in your heart

who, if it came to that,
would walk through blood or spill it—
ax, oakstave, knife—
quick-handed, resolute, ready to take
a life for a life
my life for her
life

She would have to be harsh,
cool-eyed, worn as a coin is,
bold as laughter, staunch
as a crutch

for me to trust her her
kindness and calmness
her even-handed, her sure
her healing
touch

— Margaret Cardea Black (1932-1997)

Relics

Coming home from college after coming out,
I have questions.
I find the family Bible and flip
the brittle pages to the story of Lot and his wife.

Instead of answers, I find a piece
of toe skin, hiding there like a wax-papered clover,
a relic from summer 87,
when I wanted to bury myself
piecemeal, in boxes and books—
toe skins, hairs, and crescent fingernails.
This patch is crispy and dry,
the size of communion.

I remember the day of the peeling—
June. I'm twelve.
I walk with Sarah to the shore of Lake Huron.
She's twelve and tan, a smiling, kinetic thing,
with long brown hair and soft skin.
She draws me like a body of water I don't know
I'm seeking. Sarah
finds the shade, leans
into the split trunk of an elm, rests.
I skip petoskeys across the lake,
draw back my right arm and
release their smoothness again and again,
mindlessly groping for the tension of
stones above water.

I see that thinner, smaller me,
returning and removing my squishy shoes,
grasping my clammy feet, carefully
peeling the moist, tough, opaque skin
from my big toe. I am short-haired
and sharp, prickly, vital.
I desperately want to be saved.

— Cathy Resmer