

# the empress anastasia in new york

Jan Clausen

60

Anastasia was long rumored  
to be the only member of  
the Russian imperial family  
to escape execution  
by the Bolsheviks.

1.

it has begun  
the rain

the rain-  
shaped sleep  
of women who nod in doorways

dreaming of good times  
bars and indian  
summer

2.

in the dream  
picture it is  
august i am  
standing on the grass  
beside blue water  
i am sixteen  
full of zen and  
existentialism  
acid lust wearing  
a two piece  
bathing suit i  
had my body then  
browned, frowning  
bored as havana  
before the revolution

3.

in my mother's house there are  
shelves well stocked with  
cans, mixes, paper products.  
dreams of land. dreams  
of flight to the country.  
these white-skinned dreams  
of cities without color,  
catastrophes we do not name,  
these dreams of dreamless sleep,  
remembering nothing.

4.

she hid joints of mutton  
beneath her skirt  
her pockets bulged  
pounds of butter

whole hams in her suit-  
case the good bitter  
taste of real coffee  
in her mouth she roamed  
streets freely  
the soldiers never  
caught her the jews  
trooped off to treblinka

5.

in viet nam arthritis  
is common due to  
months years spent crouched  
in damp bomb shelters

and i remember my  
mother's soft  
face skin with the  
fallout scare  
shelter with the  
shelves lined with  
canned peaches  
jugs of water  
the nuclear family  
in the atomic age and  
SAC is in the air

the bay of pigs cuban  
missile crisis got stuck in my childhood  
throat my mother  
moved the iron  
back and forth she  
listened about sues  
on the radio

and mother still writes how she  
hopes, keeps her shelves  
stocked, how she helps  
these expatriate vietnamese  
who can't find jobs  
in their adopted country

6.

please give me a little piece  
of meat for  
i cannot eat your bread  
your unhulled rice

for i am a princess  
in my own right  
country

my grandmother's face  
was famous  
in the nineties

(and castro hid  
in the mountains  
the jungles covered  
ho chi minh  
and mao is whispered  
change from out of the north  
and lenin rode east  
in a sealed train  
and iskra means  
a single spark  
can start a prairie fire)

and we came  
unto neon  
dollar signed  
miami

7.

the years  
her mother singing  
in her hair

you are the rightful  
empress  
anastasia

but she wakes in nightmare  
screaming this word  
"pretender"

mother  
what really happened  
in that cellar

8.

the streets get colder  
she grows more weary  
of lies, potatoes,  
her mother  
still mourning the tsar.

her room looks out  
on an airshaft. the carpet  
is worn. the bronx  
is burning. she never saw the neva.

she pawns the last  
of the icons.

9.

in spring she crosses  
over, joins  
the resistance.

10.

this november  
city is up  
tight. in midtown  
the ibm selectrics  
have been bolted  
to the desks  
of secretaries  
who are afraid, now  
to change jobs.  
the druggists refuse  
to fill medicaid  
prescriptions.  
a man has been shot  
for going  
over the turnstiles.

we slept overnight  
on long island,  
all the way out.  
i saw each grain  
of sand a different  
color, stuffed shells  
in my coat. i walked  
as before toward rain  
down a beach shining  
white through the storm,  
watched the tide  
turn once.

locked into the city,  
i plan to quit my job.  
i must get a jacket  
with a working  
zipper, call  
the exterminator,  
have a gate installed  
on the fire escape  
access window.

(Thanksgiving, 1975)

Jan Clausen writes poetry, fiction, and critical prose. She is the author of a book of poems, *After Touch* (Out and Out Books, 1975) and "The Politics of Publishing and the Lesbian Community" (*Sinister Wisdom*, no. 2, 1977). With friends, she edits *Conditions*, a magazine of women's writing with emphasis on work by lesbians.

## Dead in Bloody Snow

Meridel LeSueur

61

I am an Indian woman  
Witness to my earth  
Witness for my people.  
I am the nocturnal door,  
The hidden cave of your sorrow,  
Like you hidden deep in furrow  
and dung  
of the charnel mound,  
I heard the craven passing of the  
white soldiers  
And saw them shoot at Wounded Knee  
upon the sleeping village,  
And ran with the guns at my back  
Until we froze in our blood on the snow

I speak from old portages  
Where they pursued and shot into the river crossing  
All the grandmothers of Black Hawk.  
I speak from the smoke of grief,  
from the broken stone,  
And cry with the women crying from the marsh  
Trail and tears of drouthed women,  
O bitter barren!  
O barren bitter!

I run, homeless,  
I arrive  
in the gun sight,  
beside the white square houses  
of abundance.

My people starve  
In the time of the bitter moon.  
I hear my ghostly people crying  
A hey a hey a hey.

Rising from our dusty dead the sweet grass,  
The skull marking the place of loss and flight.  
I sing holding my severed head,  
to my dismembered child,  
A people's dream that died in bloody snow.

Meridel LeSueur defines herself as "a 76-year-old Mid-western writer," something of an understatement since she has published 12 books and innumerable stories, articles and poems. "Dead in Bloody Snow" is reprinted from *Rites of Ancient Ripening* (Vanilla Press, Minneapolis, 1975) in which she says, "Slogan for 76: Survival is a form of resistance."