

# POETRY

My daughter,  
Fasten a stickpin to your blouse,  
Put on your little red panties,  
drink the water in which the *metate* was washed.  
So that mother moon will not leave its stain  
On the bud of your body  
When you scratch.

## ***Night of the eclipse***

The night the dogs tattooed the silence with barking.  
The night the people came running because the moon had been eaten.

In the darkness  
a woman,  
the most pregnant among the pregnant;  
she that never sticks pins,  
that never wore red panties  
nor drank water in which the *metate* had been washed;  
she that scratched her eyes so that her baby's eyes would come out  
black,  
she gobbled the moon,  
and while everyone had turned their gazes to the moon in the sky,  
the woman illuminated the village with the light that spilled from her  
womb.

**Briceida Cuevas Cob**

Translation by Jonathan Harrington

*Hija mía,  
préndete los alfileres en la ropa,  
ponte la pantaleta roja,  
bebe del agua con que se lavó el metate  
para que mama luna no deje su mancha  
en el cuerpo de tu retoño  
cuando te rasques.*

### **Noche de eclipse**

Noche en que los perros tataron con sus ladridos  
[el silencio.

Noche de gemidos de caracoles.  
Cuando la gente corría porque se habían comido a  
[mama luna.

En la oscuridad  
una mujer,  
la más embarazada entre las embarazadas;  
aquella que no se prendió alfileres,  
aquella que no se puso la pantaleta roja  
ni bebió del agua con que se lavó el metate;  
aquella que se rascó las pupilas para que su retoño las tuviera  
[más negras,

Engulló a la luna,  
Y mientras todos buscaban a la luna con la Mirada en el cielo,  
La mujer alumbraba al pueblo con la luz que  
[desparramaba su vientre.

**Briceida Cuevas Cob**

**Eve Speaks**

*"The child is worth the birth pang.*

*Life is worth its price."*

- Eve in Her Garden in This Vale of Tears

Biddy Jenkinson

Life seeks to know itself. God too.  
Come into form, expelled, through me.  
The first of a thousand acts of letting go.  
How else will you know the touch  
of spring sun on pale skin, the scent of iris,  
an opening in conversation, the way  
movement and air become dance –  
without a cold wind to bite  
your exposed cheeks, the stench  
of cancerous liver, a locked door,  
the dog's ghost running the meadow?  
Come into form so that when you leave  
this body the world, you may be wise –  
aware that you are  
innocent. Still, I marvel  
at my creation and you,  
your first human face.

**Vicki Mandell-King**

***Two Women in Sarajevo, 2003***

At a shop in the cobbled Bastarsija  
the light of early evening lingers.  
Old friends, we confess how hard it has been

to stay with our husbands of many years,  
and the marvel that beneath deep lines  
we are still so young.

The afternoon rain at the Roman ruins  
and bombed villas remains in the air  
as fresh scent. At the Imam's call for prayers

men and boys scurry to the mosque.  
Forbidden to pray in the same sanctuary  
two women walk by dressed in *hidab* –

one in ankle-length pink silk, the other in green.  
Matching scarves cover their heads.  
As only very old friends can do

we ask that – at all cost –  
we never drift into bitterness.

**Vicki Mandell-King**

***My Mother's Address Book***

With rubber bands  
flecked with powder,  
slack as the face of  
a child who won't  
eat. Almost half  
the names crossed  
out with a line,  
Buzzy darkened over  
with a pencil, as if there  
was a rush like some  
one throwing a dead  
relative's shoes and  
wool dresses toward  
the Salvation Army  
baskets, someone  
catching a train,  
breathless, the  
graphite black as  
shining freight

**Lyn Lifshin**

***Like Some Ancient Chinese***

My mother wanted to take what  
she cherished with her. No jade,  
not the emerald she mostly saw  
as flawed, no statues or photo  
graphs of her mother: she wanted  
me to go with her. If she could  
not phone to see how I got home  
from a trip or the mall, she could

not rest. *"you're so thin,"* she  
said over and over, *"we could be  
buried in the same space."* Though  
she liked living alone as long as  
she could phone me, eternity with  
out AT&T seemed a scary way to  
any long sleep. If I could be close,  
as I was in the moon already half

underground, like a pajama party,  
or a college dorm she grinned  
over pills and IV, it might not be  
so bad she didn't get back to the  
ocean and never got to Europe  
or the west coast to lie back with  
her mouth full of dirt and never tell  
the stories and secrets she meant to

if she could still touch me

**Lyn Lifshin**

***Inside the Lilac***

If you follow the clothesline  
April's best smell will lead  
you to Grandmother's  
lilac bush. *Our lilac will grow*

*for hundreds of years*, Grandma  
says, like the ones in Rochester.  
*It's already sixty.* Heart-shaped  
leaves form a tall circle.

At the spot where the limbs don't quite  
come together, Suzanne and I walk in.  
We stand, surrounded  
by crescents of tight bursting

blossoms. Each tiny petal holds  
more smell than roses. A sticky  
smell bees can drown in.  
The lower branches, thicker

than my wrist, intertwine,  
form a ledge, where we can sit.  
Here, Suzanne says *Let's*  
*sew small cotton patches.*

*We could put them on trees, then kiss*  
*the trees.* I say I already kiss the trees.  
She says she *wants to pretend she's kissing*  
*Ricky Nelson.* I say I like bark better.

Bees buzz outside our bush.  
She says *we can make each tree*  
*a different boy.* I say I like  
kissing trees for themselves. I don't kiss

just any tree. *If our mothers find*  
*our folded fabric in our shorts' pockets,*  
she says, *they'll never know we've been*  
*kissing boys or trees.*

**Donna L. Emerson**

## ***Eulogy***

She had that odd man's name  
like poor Quentin,  
whose mama left her  
to grow up the best way she could.  
She stepped out of Mr. Faulkner's  
drowsy little southern town,  
leaving a trail of bourbon and eau  
de cologne  
and an overturned henna bottle,  
sticky on the top of the commode.  
A maelstrom of stale washcloths  
and disintegrating pink and blue chips  
of sweet soap.

But, she came back, she did.  
Our hearts tumbling after her in the  
dust  
like old shoes and tin cans  
tied behind a car.  
Home safe  
from animals that roam the night  
and sun and sidewalks,  
blinding by day,  
and people who don't know a lady  
when they see one.

High school belle,  
pretty and flirtatious,  
her head filled with assurances of  
beauty,  
(...so easy to spoil, they said,)  
disappearing into cool, remote young matron  
in fur and pearls and queenly air,  
and then just disappearing.  
Briefly meeting  
on a darkened stairway.  
The blinded faces, washing away  
behind the windows of a nowhere bus.



But, she came back, she did.  
Hiding cheap whiskey  
in tank top and wardrobe  
upstairs in the decaying rhinoceros  
that was her mother's house.  
Dime-store novels and detective books  
piled beside the bedside table  
while the cracked pitcher  
and the basin waited  
for mornings she prayed would not come,  
And the light bulb swayed  
in the high ceiling of her bedroom.  
That bitter bed she shared with no one.  
So many suicides later  
that she would not even look with me  
into the dark water below  
that windy winter afternoon  
we walked to the dock.

But, she came back, she did –  
to die slowly  
in that hot back room  
with the paid caregiver  
who fed her from glass tubes  
and who said, afterwards,  
“She just went out while I was feeding her.  
I promised I'd stay –  
I ain't afraid of the disease.”

For legacy leaving  
a book to collect names of visitors  
and a fresh-faced young priest,  
sitting rocking on the front porch  
in those creaky rockers  
with the cardboard fans lying about,  
making very small talk with the bereaved  
who weren't feeling much of anything  
until much, much later  
when the stench of white flowers  
evaporated from the air.

**Nola Perez**

***The Train, The Roar***

The train, the roar,  
the whistle of my past.  
I am motionless, dumbstruck,  
Taken out of context.  
In one ephemeral moment,  
sepia-colored, camera-shuddered  
images flash  
where people gesticulate.  
They whisper, and urge.  
Skirts swish...parasols flirt.  
They do well,  
They were born to wield them.

My mother counts the bones  
on her skeleton.  
She makes me a necklace.

My grandmother  
ties her children in her sash.  
Like Isadora,  
I try not to repeat history.  
I long to be original  
I grieve over the string of  
my days.

**Nola Perez**