

*Dana Gilkes*

## WOE AND REDEMPTION

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In the brooding light of the evening  
a man and a woman stood in the gap talking  
though not too close  
for appearance sake,  
because you know how people are...

Somebody had slapped somebody with a cutlass  
a little earlier before  
for I-don't-know-what,  
so the air was still charged  
and begging for a reprieve  
from the wilful and malicious damage  
that was caused.

My mother cast her shadow in the doorway  
(I was still pretty small)  
and called me in  
so as not to be looking  
in grown people's faces  
when they were discoursing.

Also just in case  
(and under dark breath)  
the man's wife came home sudden,  
saw him lounging about the gap  
with the *pai-pai* woman  
and decide to take recourse in a rock  
for clarification purposes.

*And the good Lord knows  
that rock-stones  
have a bad landing policy...*

Even from inside we rent-house  
you could smell a bitter, humid earth  
somebody burning stuff  
and a couple of houses down from ours  
hear a neighbour studiously singing  
or if you would prefer,  
minding her own business  
out loud as possible.

*Jesu meek and gentle...*

Her rendition was a cross  
between *pampalam* and a hymn  
and enough to set the Saviour weeping  
with the fine warble  
and the range –

thorough expiation  
for the soul.

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