Poems

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Poems

Abstract
SQUIRRELS, MEETING THE ARTIST IN DURBAN

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Squirrels

SQUIRRELS

The squirrels have been chasing each other
all morning – there are two of them.
I can hear their claws
dattering up and down the trees –
their tails swollen but ragged – they do not lose
their balance although they leave so much broken.
And they have driven away the crows.

The lean saplings whip and whip the blueness
while the squirrels leap
from branch to branch to grass –
the cracked wood echoing its own rage.
And then the grass:
grass where bees burn
sucking in,
sucking in whatever they can find
in this sun – unbearable –
the bees look angry in my stare.
Or is it simply determination?
A black and yellow concentration against green thorns.

But it is the squirrels who throw
their wired energy around me:
my ears stung, my skin
itchy from their agitation,
so I cannot sink into a book,
I cannot disappear into a story
that should hold me.

I don’t know if it is lust or anger
that makes the squirrels fling their bodies
against the trees like that – their spines so resilient.
Snake-like snappings, and then they turn
to give me monkey-like stares.
I don’t know if it is always the same squirrel
doi ng the chasing – or do they switch
positions – doing something to each other
so the one who was chased and caught
feels compelled to turn around
and begin the chase again.
It is getting hot.
Too hot for such movement.
But it is good for anger,
good for raging lust. The sky is naked,
it is a nude in its eloquence.

Even the air feels stunned
from the constant noise of whipping.
How the leaves slap the wind:
they are reckless, careless,
they don’t believe they could ever be torn.

Even when the squirrels are hidden
behind the leaves, they are not quiet
but high-pitched – clickings, a rasping,
a scraping against –
a scraping into –
bones – bones –

But I cannot see what they do.
I don’t know if they scratch each other
or if it’s only the fruit they bite into.

Is this the garden you dream of?
IS THIS THE GARDEN YOU’RE STUCK IN?
MEETING THE ARTIST IN DURBAN

My name is Philomen. I am self-taught – This is red-ivory, here, a kudo – People think I am crazy because I get my wood out of the river – I don’t chop down trees. I sit by the river for many hours watching for wood. I fish for wood. This piece, this kudo took three days to finish. Oh I can find many branches – tambouti red-ivory – the Zulu woman bends like that – very low down she goes with the wood. I am self-taught. I go outside – I stay in the bush – I watch the birds. I watch kudo – I plant new trees. People think I am crazy because I spend all day looking for wood in the river. I don’t chop trees. No, my father did not teach me this. I am self-taught. I taught myself English also – when I speak with you I learn more English. There is a lot of fighting – my people they beat their women – that is why I carved a woman bent down – but she is big very big, you see how she looks through her legs.