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Poems

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Poems

Abstract
SQUIRRELS, MEETING THE ARTIST IN DURBAN
Squirrels

Squirrels

The squirrels have been chasing each other all morning - there are two of them. I can hear their claws clattering 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 doing 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.