

Louise Kantro

Café con leche

I sucked sugar out of hollow sticks
that dropped from sugar cane trucks.

 You worried about bills
 and finding child care.

I helped *la criada* clean the floor
by skating across it on a towel.

 You watched him sip *café con leche*
 with her – and they glowed.

I stared at droplets of blurry rainbows
phosphorescent on pink and aqua walls.

 You vacated your mind for one whole
 weekend as you burned with jealousy and rage.

I inhaled the stink of the exhaust from buses,
so different from those in Michigan.

 You cursed the unlucky moment you suggested
 this place for him to find a job, to bring me up.

I went where you did when you left him.



"Headlands," painting by Henrietta Sparkman

Headlands

In World War I the soldiers learned not to
make noise no matter how bad the wound,
but the horses, knowing only fear and pain,
writhed in agony, cried out their terror.
'Tis a pitiable sight to see a collapsed horse.
Without swift medical intervention and
tender hands, he might never again rise.

The headlands formation in Monterey –
a collage of Nature – shows the horse giving,
as he has for centuries, to those who use
him to forge a path for themselves,
a monument of his valiance and devotion.

This poem was part of an ekphrastic exhibit of Modesto Pen Women on display at the Carnegie Arts Center in Turlock from February 11 – June 7, 2015.

Departure

I pack quickly while he is at work.
By noon I am ready to leave.
At five I pass through Omaha with
two more hours of sunlight,
suitcase open at my side.
On a seven-mile-long stretch
of construction zone I fling out
blouses, pants, dresses, bras, underwear,
my eyes ahead and on rear-view mirror,
pleased that the pieces of my past life
have landed on the divide.
Some construction worker's wife
or the worker herself can retrieve
my size 10's and begin a new
designer-wardrobe life.
I know all about this:
the manic stage.
But they're wrong.
Everything is clear to me now.

Meds, counseling, nothing helped.
She moped and drooped, unable
to shop or cook or some days even get dressed.
Was her depression interior
or caused somehow by me?
Maybe the lines that had become etched
on my face emphasized for her
the abyss she'd fallen (or believed
she'd been pushed) into.
When I came home to find her gone,
my relief was stronger than my worry.
"Don't look for me," said her note.

Siren Song

Sorrow
leans on my shoulders.
Your whispers –
hurtful, hissing –
disappear into the gray
opaqueness of morning's
soft wall of damp air.
I can hear your song
but only as echoes.
I find no sense
in your message.
I concentrate
strain out the peripheral
still hear only fog
thick and dense.

Usually
the sun emerges
chases the gray.
The heavy cloud
lightens in weight,
in color, as it
reveals blue sky.
When light spreads
I hear no more whispers.

Still, your song lingers
hiding in tree branches
lurking under the eaves
of someone's house,
maybe yours,
maybe mine.

Things I Have No Words For

When I close my eyes

I can see the sea
in blue, blue gray, Caribbean,
blue green, cerulean,
cadet green, green blue.

I can touch sands
of apricot, brown, desert,
burnt sienna, maize, sepia,
tan, tumbleweed.

I can feel the swing of days
from blue violet, fuschia,
granny smith apple, cornflower,
pine green to scarlet.

Why can I not find shades
of orchid, smoke, onyx,
leather jacket, licorice
as distinct from the black

of soul's darkest times.

Louise Kantro, retired teacher, mother of grown sons, cat-lover, and ball-and-chain to her husband of 44 years, plays bridge, tends to her 91-year-old mother, goes to the library every three weeks, and volunteers as a court advocate for foster children.