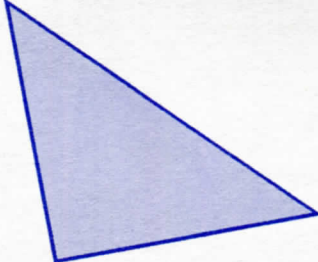




Poetry

Reviews



Resource
Center
Update

Riza Faith C. Ybanez

Family Portrait

Grandmother sits by the window
Bent low upon her patterns
In cross-stitch.
A few more, she says,
And another piece
Completed.

Mama comes home
From school.
She sits to catch
Her breath, then rises,
Sets the table, murmuring
About a faculty strike.

Papa slips in quietly.
He's late again.
A friend's birthday, he explains,
He couldn't refuse a drink.
Men never refuse
A drink, he says.

My brother drops by
With some of his friends.
He says it's cold outside
He needs his jacket.
We're thankful he drops by
Even if only for his jacket.

Me, I'm turning ten next month
Grandmother is teaching me
To cross-stitch.
But I always end up
Breaking her needles.
She says I'm a curse to womanhood.

Mama is teaching me to cook.
I'll need it when I marry, she says.
Ah, she doesn't know
Papa has told me I'm crazy
Because I told him
I'll never marry.

My brother, he's okay.
Sometimes, I think he doesn't know me.
But I guess he does
'Cause he told me he'll kill me
If he ever catches me
Riding his motorbike again.

Riza Faith C. Ybanez

Absence

And so my night is fed to eager mosquitoes
As my ears feign deafness
To the thunderous tick of your absence.

I pray tomorrow I shall wake
To find your tears upon the grass
Where I stood to say goodbye.

Riza Faith C. Ybanez

Mother-Weaver (for Marj)

Fingers deft
Interlacing
Warp against weft
(Dreams against being)
Weaving patterns
On the mat
Where your children
Lay at night
Conjuring
Patterns of their own.

Riza Faith C. Ybanez

Symmetry

Homeward she walks,
Windblown feet in worn-out slippers
Sculpting footfalls on the sand
That echo forty years of tramping
Upon that very same shore.

She sees a package of uneaten burgers
Abandoned by carefree picnickers.
She picks it up, unfazed
By the big bundle of unsold kangkong
Balancing upon her gray hair.

A few steps behind
An eight-year old girl trails,
Playful and amused
As she sinks her bare feet
Into her lola's footprints.

Hungry after a day at the market,
She sees a broken shell
And bends to pick it up
As the big bundle of unsold kangkong
Falls from her small, dark head.

(Lola means grandmother)

Riza Faith C. Ybanez

Riza (Richie) Faith C. Ybanez is Chair of the Manila-based feminist
organisation Kalayaan. She is a researcher and law student.

Vaine Rasmussen

A SIMPLE MISTAKE

When a life together
enters a lull
What does one do?

Have a drink?
Take a lover?
Praise the Lord?

Or is the answer
In you and me.
Just that
others take
first place
over us
and it's custom
not to say
'No!'

Vaine Rasmussen

UNBROKEN VOWS

Did you mean it
When we said 'in sickness and in health'
It's hard to tell
with the silence growing longer
and nights lone and cold.

Did you mean it
When you said 'I do'
It's hard to tell
with a smashed lip
and bruised soul

or

Did you believe me
when I said 'till death us do part'
if you did
then you're the sucker.

Vaine Rasmussen

Vaine Rasmussen is a consultant economist in rural development with the South Pacific Commission, she is from the Cook Islands.

THREE WOMANIST LITANIES

Imani-Sheila Newsome

These poetic reflections were created to be read by African-American women as an alternative to prayers or convening invocations. I feel it is important to hear our own mouths, the power to make the sacred space. In order to make the sacred, we must understand the nature of the divine as revealed in the historical action and voices of our mothers. The eternal spirit called God, Goddess, Mover, Catalyst recalls to our limbs and lips the songs, moans, and steps of the 'old mothers'.

My litanies reflect words, visions, and activities common, I hope, to many African-American women. They are designed to be read in groups large and small. Parts can be designated to women in order to replicate the familiar 'Call and Response' pattern of vocalization familiar in African-American Christian worship.

Litany I

When our mothers met in this circle
They told stories of spirits and lovers long gone
Their daughters, sisters, friends
They sang

Where we stand lightning strikes
When we move hope is born
How we live - spirit proves

On the rolling sea in a hell dressed
darkness and fear our mothers sat.
The past a ghost with haunting cry
The future a moaning voice colored by despair
They sang

Repeat chant

When told that Divine life depended on southern dirt
watered by our red blood,
When tears watered cotton, cane and leaf.
Girls with heavy breasts did not believe, but
They sang

Repeat chant

Wishing, Wishing turned with deliberate speed
to freedoms sighs and sweetened liberty
snatched from crushing fist
hiding love, storing it for another time
A people sang

Repeat chant

Now we women framed in modern prose
Our own text written by our own hand
We rehearse our own salvation for
our children and our lives
We teach all to sing

Repeat chant

LITANY

Litany II for Kitchen Table Talk

ALL WOMEN:

Come, woman, sit at this table
There are things, most needed
Speak of those gone and those to come
Healing, laughter and tears

WOMAN #1

Snap beans in a bowl echo the
breaking of a thousand hearts
Place your hands in the bowl and help me

WOMAN #2

Tell me a story now, with the
dishes gone and pot hung
There is plenty of time

WOMAN #3

Against the noise of a barking dog
an old man's snore or a woman's sigh
whisper your secrets here
Where they cannot be desecrated

ALL WOMEN

Come, woman, sit at this table
There are things, most needed
Speak of those gone and those to come
Healing, laughter and tears

WOMAN #4

If we meet like this, will our
hunger, like fire under
a griddle, make us hot to the touch...

WOMAN #5

So that the water of destruction
and pain will skip across our
sore backs

WOMAN #6

Come, woman, rest at this table
There are things most needed
Let's speak of those gone
and those to come
Healing, laughter and tears

ALL WOMEN

Keep me company while I stir this pot
to keep life in me moving
to keep life in me moving
to keep Spirit in me flowing
to keep ALL in us growing
Come, woman, talk at this table
There are truths most needed
Let's speak of those gone and those to come
Healing, laughter and tears

L I T A N Y

Litany III

One Woman

When and where we enter
all our sister come
a cloud of witnesses
singing our name

One Woman

How many times can I tell you
this story?
Familiar phrases strung together
like cheap beads scattered
before we know their beauty.

All Women

When and where we enter
all our sisters come
a cloud of witnesses
singing our name.

Three Women

They say "We've come this far
by faith."
When we come forward
it is not just faith that
propels us forward
it is the echoes of prayers
of whitedress women and
Sunday School teachers.

Two women

And if there is a wall
a fire around me I
can call on that
praying/singing
place it in my mouth
and from the womb of my spirit
comes healing for my
daughters

One woman

and my sons

Four women

Walking on water or
sand or shattered
hearts
God is with us
Running forward to mercy
We can carry others along

Two women

The Spirit leading
through storm
and wind
through empty myths
and secret sin.

All women

For when and where we enter
our sisters and
brothers
our sons and daughters
our neighbors
our repentant now knowing
enemies
all come
singing our names
in praise of God.

Source: Three Womanist Litanies, WTC Newsletter,
December 1993, Women's Theological Center,
P.O. Box 1200, Boston, MA 02117-1200, USA.
