

PAM OXENDINE

Toronto is a city of exiles

I

yesterday I left Pittsburgh
through the vast symmetry
of Pennsylvania hills
move towards a home
I've begun to accept
today I awaken with the familiar
my coffee pot the bent spatula
that held askew coddles eggs

it's past noon, my daughter's at school
I dial you
close friend and barometer
bringing new perceptions
for this persisting intimacy
ways of the people I met
the beauty of Pittsburgh coiled in rivers
bridges, house-speckled hills
the tension of it's underbelly
dead steel mills
reborn in other places
cheap and foreign

everyone out of work empty
as shelled giants lining the river
now sullen and flameless in early morning light
hulks merge into grey river
with fog that arches slowly
up off the water.

II

fingers filmy with butter and crumbs
I dial you
hear Bishop was murdered
Grenada broken by shifting hands

three days you've been moving
holding vigil different places
while the slaughter of possibility develops
people shot curfews
you wait for the names of the dead

I can't find you
move to the sink begin supper
again and again fingers swirl up cloudy water
washing starch free from rice
there is no word yet of your sister
staring into the brightness of a white sink
my eyes become wet stones

Toronto is a city of exiles
and they don't want us here
falling into this place grateful and angry

cold refuge without definition
driving survivors into shells or suicide
this city that hates strangers
yet is infested with them.

III

washing rice
my mind fingers the years:
nameless, running, pregnant
filthy rooms
waiting out Vietnam
living with Constanza, watching her
stunned and internal remembering Chile
her family embers dying across Europe

evenings she would fade
back to a mother tongue
apologize for the closed door
as she turned to face a nervous son
smoothing wrinkles of his jarred life
with Spanish
her eighteen them so alone

Toronto is a city of survivors
lucky depressed ones
we live here
finding it so hard to take root
in tough, cool soil
watching ourselves as shadows
of where we are from.

TRENT UNIVERSITY WOMEN'S STUDIES PROGRAM

Moving Forward: Setting a Feminist Agenda for the 1990s

A Women's Studies Conference aimed at bringing together feminist activists and academics to facilitate the sharing of research and resources is to be held 15-17 June 1990 at Trent University.

Conference objectives will be achieved through workshops, panel discussions, and academic papers focussing on: Women and Work; Social Justice; Control and Safety of Women's Bodies; Women's Culture.

Proposals are invited for all three conference formats. Deadline for academic paper proposals (15 minutes long) is 15 August 1989. Contact:

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