

hugging her. I hugged her for what seemed like eternity until the green onion “perfume” became part of me.

Mama, through her sobs, told me how much she hated the smell too. She told me that every day she wanted to quit. But she couldn’t quit because of us, her children. She told me that it wasn’t easy finding a job as a foreigner in Canada. She told me that the type of work available for her now was either domestic work or farm labour. But she swore to me that one day, one day, she would find something else. She said that she was almost enticed by the job offer of one of her employers the other day. There was a lady whose house she cleaned who offered her a position as her children’s nanny because the other nanny quit. Mama said she almost took it because it meant she wouldn’t have to work so hard on the farm to pick the onions. She told me that her wages depended on the quantity of onions she picked and not the hours she worked. But when she calculated how much the woman was offering it was slave labour compared to her onion gig. Moreover, being a nanny meant that she would only get the Sunday off and she would have to find someone else to watch us.

I felt so selfish as I heard Mama’s story. I wiped her tears with my shirt and continued to hug her.

“So you see Anabella, I hate green onions too. But the love I have for you and Jonathan is stronger than my hate. Never forget that. So forgive me, if I continue to bring this smell home but until I find something better it’s our best choice.”

I nodded. By the time Mama was done giving her speech, I also had tears streaming down my face. “I’m sorry Mama. I’m really sorry.”

“It’s okay baby, it’s okay,” whispered mama as she gently stroked my tear-stained face.

Years later, I still remember that moment. Who would believe that

green onions would have such an effect on my life?

Mama eventually found a better job a year later, but she never found anything stable as a professor, although she had adjunct positions here and there. Her employment was always precarious. Yet she managed to keep us fed and ensured Jonathon and I attended university. Jonathon got the job Mama never could get. He’s a tenured professor of Political Science.

Me? I write stories. I fight for immigrants’ rights. I decry the injustices of migrant labour policies. I don’t have direct experience. But I saw Mama live it. I saw the pain in her eyes. I saw her sometimes, when she

thought I wasn’t looking, hold on to her back whenever she tried to bend over or do anything that proved too strenuous for her back.

Most importantly, I’ve found a way to find the good in green onions. I’ve found a way to make delectable meals with the help of green onions.

I love green onions because Mama loved me.

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SUSAN MCCASLIN

Uttermost

I have been in my uttermost mettle
a mother, kind, unkind,
obsessive, crazed, outraged,
hungering for my child waif
to hunger for her womanhood,
to cup her day and drink.

Yet I too am Kore, a witness
in the land of the dark Lord,

and I mother with tumult and fanfare
or quietly as a reef
the self that, once marauder,
now is barely drawing breath,
ghosting the shore.

Susan McCaslin is a Canadian poet and Faculty Emeritus of Douglas College in Westminister, BC, where she taught English and Creative Writing for twenty-three years. She is the author of eleven volumes of poetry, including her most recent, Demeter Goes Skydiving (University of Alberta Press, 2011). The latter was a finalist in 2012 for the BC Book Prize (Dorothy Livesay Award) and the winner of the 2012 Alberta Book Publishing Award (Robert Kroetsch Poetry Book Award). Susan resides in Fort Langley, British Columbia.