

CATHY FORD

The Woman Who Took Off All Her Clothes and Set Them on Fire

(for March 8, International Women's Day, 1992, and for Sharon H. Nelson)

1  
ablaze

her hair lit by the light of combustion  
spontaneous, her body swaying  
to the crackle drum beat heartsound  
of fire, she is

the woman who cannot agree  
the woman who is shunned  
the woman who raises her voice  
or her head above the water

water and fire, it is said,  
do not marry

2  
silent

her eyes the eyes of a grandmother  
in a younger body, it must be  
genetic; the rooms sway their walls  
outward, away from her scorched power,  
she is

the woman who says nothing  
the woman, not speaking, as she removes her  
clothes  
the woman with no scars or  
visible marks, no open wound

do not open your door, women say to one  
another  
to strangers

3  
unrepentant

her small hands, spiritual messages  
or the covering of sex, her beloved  
breasts, inversion of hair, uncovered,  
hands refusing  
to fall into the sign of the cross, she is

the woman who will not compromise  
the woman with the smell of flesh burning  
the woman who is another human torch,  
or naked, simply stands her ground

if you can't take the heat, *my little darling*,  
stay out of the kitchen

4  
immoveable

her clarity of perception, that passion  
for the absolute, she is awakened, un-  
dressed,  
and cannot sleep, she rests  
but does not give up, she is

the woman in dreams that are messages  
the woman who was a child, looking back at us  
the woman who is not yet a walking conflagra-  
tion, scarred  
a survivor of incest, or politics; or a once bat-  
tered wife

go in peace, *cherished one*,  
go in peace

5  
mountainous

her tiny feet are sparked by the charring  
of cotton picked by women; of polyester,  
factory-sewn by women; of linen, cloud  
smoked,  
ancient marked by bits of burnt letters,  
like flesh, she is

the woman whose skeleton shows, she is trans-  
lucent  
the woman held upright by ghosts, by the work  
of women's hands,  
the woman who sees every other woman  
in every other colour, shape, size, life

don't be a martyr, *dearest*; it echoes  
we are finished now with the burning of witches

6  
(eternal, etc.)  
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*Cathy Ford lives on Mayne Island in British Columbia. She has published nine books of poetry to date. She is a feminist activist working locally for world peace, global disarmament, and environmental preservation.*