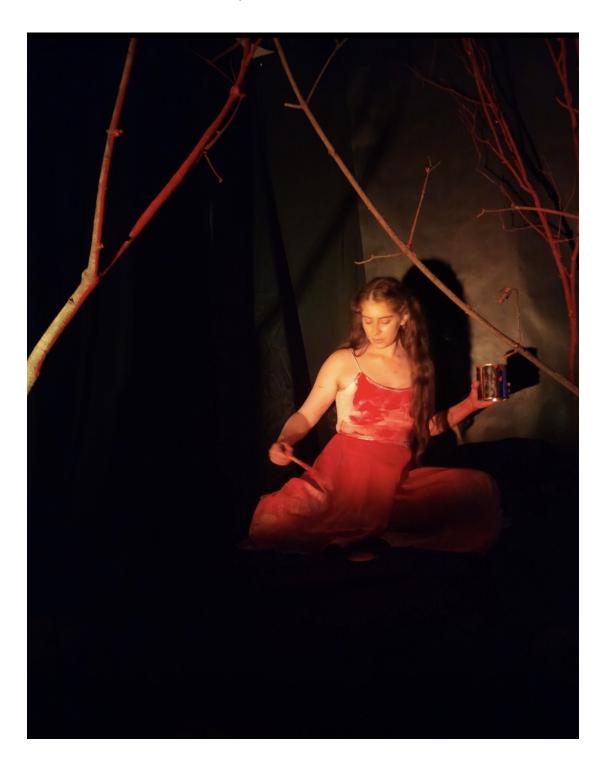
Red Poem

by Rebecca Schrader



Red, the first color, red,
the color of sex, the first blood; red,
the shame, red,
the breaking: you never see it coming.
Shaking, red
sleep, red
silence, red,
screaming, "hold me,
feed me, give me your water,
love me, love me, I am wide open!"

Red has no answer.

Red is not a question.

Red is like skin, it stains and it stretches and smears; yes, red can rip and tear and fall off the bone, deep white, yes, red is angry.

Paying tribute to the red girls, the girls who once danced in white, their long hair blowing behind them in the wind like silk, the girls who loved freely, who embraced the earth and the sky and the sun, I huddled in the red room, holding myself tightly, fiercely, wanting to be seen and afraid of seeing.

"The moon had nine times lost her light."

Remembering the red girls, I

painted myself in their tears, and I painted the trees too.

Blue seems so far away now.

Did I dream it?

What was the blue part of me?

Blue is the center of the flame. Blue is a dying star. Blue is a memory of something that can never again be. Blue has taught me to be patient. Blue has lifted me up and carried me away. Blue comes and goes.

Red is always with me. Red is boiling under. Red burns many shades, feverish and quick.

Some reds are innocent, like red berries, and warm fires, and falling leaves, like red balloons and wheelbarrows, red apples and lollipops and blushes—the little reds. The accidental reds. Reds that do no harm.

Red lips and roses are reds that cut and bite, reds that are too red, achingly red, reds like open wounds. Why are we so afraid to look into the darkness? I am more afraid of the light — the pleasure is too much.

Unwanted pleasure is worse than pain.

The color of my shame is red. My guilt is red and my hands are red and so are the tops of my thighs.

This redness, this anger, am I to blame?

He came to me in a shower of gold.
He sang to me and brought me sweet things like candy.
They call it rapture.
They call it revelation.
Ecstasy when he comes.
I was thinking of my mother, too far away to give me shelter.

No one could hear
the cries of the red girls.
They were all alone.
Red girls, I see you,
red girls, I am you, red girls,
let me be your balm.
Don't you see it is you who I love?

I remember crouching together in the red tent, washing

the place between our legs, the air thick with incense and smoke.

I remember the nudes, thirteen bodies on a hill made of glass, the wind cleansing the bones.

wind creatising the bolies.

I remember the rites of spring, and

the scarlet letter, and

the wine-dark sea.

I remember Jane, and Charlotte, and Hester,

Sula and Leda, Io, Daphne, Danae,

Judith, Anne, Assata, Simone,

Emily, Sarah, Rachel, and Leah,

Iphigenia, Hecate, Kali, Astarte,

Venus, Sibyl, Mary, Joan... I could go on.

In the black box, I

feel my heart open and close.

Some scars never go away.

The red girls, they are always with me.

So much depends on them.

The wind is gone.

No one can see me.

I too walked out of the light.