

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.
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.