

## **In the Wake of the Flood.**

My home sits empty.

A tall, angular lady with black-rimmed eyes

and a feathered poinciana hat,

we painted her skin dark

six summers ago -

a bold move in a neighbourhood of white,

a statement, a declaration:

I have shattered the shell of conformity,

and I am not afraid.

We filled her giant sun-dappled heart with a table for ten,

and platters and pens and Band-aids

and photos and music and blankets,

and the pieces of a family freshly broken.

I hung a domed fireplace in her centre,

a pendant of kindness

gifted from me to me

during the divorce

when the air simmered with gossip,

and my sisters piously cast their stones

and branded me:

A heathen, a traitor, a witch...

The dancing flames a reminder

that burning can be holy,

that energy must be fuelled,

that this too will pass.

My black lady home sits empty  
on the reclaimed bank of an invisible creek -  
the whole damned street a white man's folly.  
Two hundred years of sponsored insolence:  
Middle fingers cocked  
to the Dreamtime, the Serpent,  
the earth and the tides.

I visit her at daybreak  
to ask for help and wisdom.  
Should she stay or should she go?

I need to choose her fate  
in the wake of the flood that almost drowned her  
nineteen moons ago,  
when El Nina mocked her neatly guttered hem,  
and giggled up through drains and pipes  
and into every chamber of her tastefully decorated lungs.  
She coughed us into the night:  
half a dozen ragtag Noahs  
and a ragdoll cat,  
drenched with uncertainty.

Now my empty black lady home  
is dry and cool and pinking with the sunrise.  
I rest against a cheek of wall  
where the fireplace used to be,  
and listen.

I hear singing from the floodplain below,  
where for thousands of years  
(before drains and tables and streets and domes)  
Black ladies gathered,  
found and gave shelter,  
lit and stoked fires,  
were filled by the bodies of their children,  
and filled them in return.

Voices lifted in praise and lament,  
generation upon generation;  
birthing, dying, feeding and healing,  
in rhythm with this land.

These women lived for their children,  
just as I do.

"Change is coming," they sing.

"Change always comes.

Have no fear."

"Remember your place in the grand scheme of things,  
little mother who has the heart of the Great Mother,  
brave woman misnamed in the name of God,  
chosen circuit-breaker to the cycle of abuse.

"You are part of us,  
the great turning.

We bless you to be here.

We are here too.

"In the dense fog of grief  
and the lightning crack that brands,  
in the gales of displacement  
and the seedpod that lies in wait,  
We are with you.

"You belong," they cry.

"Your black lady home  
will once again be full -  
a sanctuary, a hearth, a nest.  
Your children and their children,  
the indigo, the rainbow and the beige,  
will gather here beneath  
the bright cloud of our foremothers,  
and know peace.

"And so, dear daughter, will you."