Haitian Village Lady

Judith C. McArdle
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Haitian Village Lady
Judith C. McArdle

Village lady,
I look at you
Eye to eye to eye.
Picked out from all around us here
like lint from a dark dress,
I fix you on this paper to remember.

I hear you are a widow woman
who lost her last son.
I see grief cling to you like black salve,
and emptiness weight you down.
I know beneath your rags
lies the belly that housed him early
And held him wet with birth from your thighs.
Your breasts old avocados now
once had the blue white milk
That gave him laughing teeth
and long bones.
Your arms that hang down heavy
rocked him baby,
Hips rode him child,
Back that brought him to the cane field
bore him sleepy in the sack.

"Mamu, Mamu"
he calls to you.
His calling sound
Rings round, rings round
The gold in your ear
And swims like fish in your head.

He is no more.

Your sisters tell you cry!
Dance the rage of death!
But your tears lie like stones on a cave floor.
And your legs stand like tree stumps in the ground.

He is no more.

Papa took him from you.
He took him
Not like the others
Who sleep with women under the bush.
Wear stiff shirts,
And trade their blood for salt.
He took him with a knife
Because he would not go.
He cleaved him in two
to feed the earth a body
And the sky a soul.
Now he belongs to no one.
Papa wanted him for fear and death,
You wanted him for fields and fruit.
Papa for powder, black and white.
You for fire and drum
For morning's rain and play magic.

Neither yours nor his now,
he is no more.
What is left of a lost last son
a mother full of sorrow,
a despot full of worms,
And no one who hears the birds sing anymore.