

June Spalding



Koromantyn Girl

The one overboard is my sister.
I hold her grave inside me,
a memorial without words, a fire
scurrying along my shackled legs,
rushing to scorch out a spot
on the sweet shores of paradise.

This is the land of wood and water,
swimming with bodies
oiled and revived for
hands that will fondle their future
like pirated pieces of eight,
a buccaneer's contraband
brought ashore at Port Royal,
fertile port for successive shipments
of sea-scarred bodies and eyes
like mine, that cast a backward glance
through time and memory.

And all the while
I fetch the wood and water
for somebody else, not for me,
for I am a slave,
weatherproofed by my blackness,
working to increase the fields of sweet
brown sugar that spring from the blood
of fingers splayed in sun-struck fields.

The black molasses on Massa's table
sweetens his imperial palate,
but not his tongue that could halt
my cane-carved callouses.
My two yellow children
caress Massa's food in the big kitchen,

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Calabash

while Major eyes their pale, suspicious legs
tripping from stove to sink
between a promise and daybreak,
his head resting on well-fed forepaws that
Massa strokes in the prim shadows.

But Massa ignores the love Missis begs for
in the bated despair of her night,
when his determined boots crunch the dirt
outside my door,
and I wield my machete in silence
at cane leaves and the bleached head
hovering above my corn-husk pillow
that offers dreams livelier than he finds
between his own white sheets.

My own sister's hands model corals
in the warm Caribbean sea.
And the lonely island,
adrift from its mother continent,
stares at my torn, worm-eaten hands
that grip the cold earth,
buttressed by a charged body, bent,
but buoyed by tomorrow,
bowed on land
as on that fearful passage
of shackled tongues
and conspiring tides
that hide my sister's name
from the whip,
while fearless maroons
resist white bayonets and bullets,
and I, fierce and proud,
child of a free people,
will rise like doubloons
recovered from the seabed.

