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An Act of Translation / Primitive Customs

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An Act Of Translation

By Diane Glancy

What can I give you? I have nothing to give. You enter my hands; words are born. I send them to you, but my handwriting is like the flight of a small flock of birds. High on muted Western Oklahoma plains, north to gyp hills, grasses wave like feathers or stand silent as haystubbles after field-flight.

A chickenhawk rises in the hush. I have nothing but the inarticulate grasp of it. What can I give?

Words are what you have been to me: a circling flock of geese above the cornfield. But they change when I give them back to you.

A white dog rides in the back of a truck, the tail-gate down; he holds himself stiffly.

How can I give my words to you? He gave them first to me; your meaning stirs within. What can I give? A child not of bone nor ear but one of words and duration. A vision of white-tailed geese in the winter haze between us.

I see your world as whole and give it back to you in different form as an act of translation.

Decipher the stubble of my words.

Bring flight up unfamiliar steps.

Pull roots of our being as though the moon twirled in the sky like a slow dancer or a white Brittany dog.

My words follow as you hunt in fields. Cover my pain with your love, flush quarry from the dogwood bush, rise to flint hills.

Old council ground for Indians wreathed with fiery vowels burned of their consonants.

Blackened fields: my words are the remains of cornrows.

I walk on wounded leg, interpret the undergrowth of fences.

The lines of words I give you wiggle like tread-marks of tires in mud.

Fields smell of black powder with the recoil of rifle.

White dog in the cratered field looks back to moon with distant, similar face.

Somewhere in the void I scrape hollow hills with the gnawing heat of motion, hold you on the hunting knife with quarry.

I relate to the space between us, reach to you with separation scraped clean.

What can I give you? I have nothing but words.

They dance steady and distilled as the hawk that circles above the road.

Primitive Customs

By Yvonne Carpenter

Sahara's Wodaabe women measure their wealth by the number of ceremonial clay pots carried through the desert for display once a year.

How foolish! Everyone knows wealth is measured by the number of circles of yellow metal which encompass the appendages of your body.