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Splinters of Wood

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Splinters of Wood

I

it did not truck with the weak had defied the hurricanes of '29 and '32 and survived
a brown rain of teeny eggs my grandfather's consumption and my grandmother's goose iron
seething in coals and rage flying at a philandering husband

it was a house of ambition smoking grey a dark low cloud trimmed in winter green
where my father's people of three generations memorized their way up the colonized
ladder of education rung by rung through open season and closed now my
grandmother's clapboard two-storey house where we all lived in the open and my home
of ten summers

II

the wooden splinters wasn't so bad shallow as they was confined in my skin
a fire-cleaned sewing needle between my mother's fingers bleach-eaten and calloused
some rubbing alcohol a prick and a pick pick pick routine in-house operations and
oh!! lookee here!!! a sleepy sliver of our porch prick quick prick a wince precise
eviction from a deaf foot or hand but never no loud cry

my mother silent daughter-in-duty-and-in-law dreamed in concrete for twenty years prayed
each day for another block of cement to build the walls of a new home and a bedroom
with a door to concretise the future one more block to cover overexposed rods of
rusted iron a daily promise of my father

III

in '63 when I left home the concrete mixer was there over there across the street from my
grandmother's home in the quarry where we played in the pit and sifted sand where a
concrete one-storey stood with tilted iron rods awaiting a second storey a one-storey
where caskets lay in velvet majesty a second storey to be named Bethlehem house of
god our new home my mother's dream in the concrete

I was here in our clapboard two storey saying bye to my grandmother my yard of juju
guinep coconuts and crotons where we played church school and porkin
in the open bye to home where we played dollie house on the porch with our pink-faced
cherubic dolls where we played doctors and nurses behind the outhouse with cousins and
neighbourhood children I was here saying bye bye to the termites I would no longer sweep
away and the pine living-room floor polished in my image I was on my way to better
education abroad

IV

when it happened I wasn't there and no one told me my mother never wrote a rip-by-rip report no one spoke of the contracted hands that battered my home like no hurricane could that scattered it like a child's game of pick-up-sticks I know my home of Abaco pine didn't give in easy my grandmother's clapboard two-storey home where we all lived in the open pulled apart board by board my home a rubble of no pickupsticks I never minded a heated sewing needle a dab of alcohol and the pricking and picking of skin in the open spaces

over there in the quarry in the summer of 1965 my first return home to our new concrete house across the street on the second-storey where we all lived in my mother's concretised dream in rooms with doors my grandmother and I in one bedroom muggy nights fell asleep between my thighs one mid-summer night's blood woke me up first ever I stuffed myself with a thick thick sigh of readiness and toilet paper

V

that summer morning I walked to our living-room sweeping my fingers along the concrete wall bumpety bump and a quick quick slide across the tiles towards my parent's new bedroom to get some shillings for kotex a sighting of my father's nakedness first ever white fruit-of-the-loom in hand bleached and ironed sent me wheeling straight pass the open door to my sisters' new bedroom where without breath I awaited the ripcurrent

my mother said nothing all summer long about my old home or new blood her new concrete house or dad's nakedness not a thing about the new concrete foundation my grandmother's soon-to-be concrete home over there across the street where we all used to live in the open where my heart still lived in a splinter

VI

my mother said nothing nothing nothing about my old home the phantom frame across the street a tick tick in the silence the curse of Ham hung in the balance in the zigzag war of wood and concrete

it was a house of ambition purified and sanctified where my mother's dreams were cast in concrete the splinters of wood buried in her body could not be removed