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My Grandmother

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My grandmother is seven feet tall and walks with a stick.
She raises herbs and spices in her garden and waters them with sweat.
My grandmother has the strength of a man
or did.
And is a woman like all the women I know.
My grandmother smokes a pipe filled with
her own combination of weeds and grasses.
Smoke rises and encircles her head,
a head, now white
with the ages of life.
NOW tired, but always tall. A face that gives hope.
The smoke rises and shows her the way.
She sits
in her house
which was one room plus kitchen and bath.
She raised me.
She raised us.
Tall, strong, big woman,
reminding me of food and love,
No man could ever out do.
No man could ever undo.

My grandmother sits.
Smoke circling around her head.
Bathing her face.
Thick smoke.
Impenetrable smoke.
And she sees.
Her watery blue eyes—or were they grey!
Look out, awash with life and death.
Look out at us, at me,
as she speaks.

My grandmother is seven feet tall and walks with a stick.
She holds a pipe, a clay pipe, between her teeth and lips.
Perfect teeth, not one missing, grasp the end of the pipe, the clay pipe.
Smoke rises around her head
so
she can see.

My grandmother
has a hard face.
But she raised us, me, with love.
Each and every year has left a line.
As lines cross and re-cross my grandmother's face I sit and touch her cheek.
The severe woman dissolves.
And, as the smoke rise she begins to speak.
Speak woman!
No man can out speak her.
No man will try.

I sit and her big woman arms embrace me in a world in which
there is no end.
No end to life.
Death only adds to life.

My grandmother raised me with the herbs and spices she watered with sweat. She fertilised us with wisdom. The smoke fills my eyes and the light is dim, under the shade of the eternal mango tree, the purple of the orchids that command her porch, the perfume of the stephanotis that creeps around the rafters and up posts. I am still not my grandmother. The smoke fills her eyes and she can see. We sit under the shade of her porch where life passes up and down in front of us and stops in to say good morning or good night. She speaks to us of 100 years ago when my grandfather went away and then came back. Perhaps it's more than 100 years. Time goes on without counting here under the shade of the mangoes.

My grandmother smokes a pipe of herbs and grasses she grows. My grandmother walks around her land everyday. The land that her mother willed to her, where she planted my grandmother's birth waters and let everyone grow out of. The land my grandfather bought and lived on. She walks with a stick around the once barren land that my grandfather bought her. Now made into a forest of green.