

Baylorian 2008

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*Kaylynn J. Bishop***Racing the Fall**

Bring your net and run with me.
We'll catch fireflies in Fall,
swim in snow, and remember
the future between ribbons of mesh
and lightning.

Pandora will tempt our hands
and beg our eyes, but we'll be perched
at the edge of Andromeda watching
colors collide in the white-hot heavens.

Caught, they'll dissect our hearts.
Tears will melt the sucrose
dream and rot the fruit we buried
in the trenches of our pockets
and scattered.

Sandra Pérez Rodríguez

The Day Grandma Almost Killed Daddy

It was a beautiful spring day in May 1967 and my family was getting ready to go visit Grandma Pérez. She was old and mean, but she was my Daddy's mama, so we had no choice but to go.

"Mom, I don't want to go. Grandma is always mean to you, and it makes me sad when she treats you bad," I told mom.

With her loving eyes and gentle touch, Mama cupped my face.

"Oh, *mija*, your grandma is getting old and becoming grouchier. She doesn't intend to be a mean person; it's just her age and the hard life she's lived. It will be okay; we are just going to visit for a short while," Mom said.

Against my wishes, we piled into our station wagon with the rest—all seven of us.

It took us about 40 minutes to get there, since we lived in West Austin and she in Round Rock. She lived in an old house that stank like a sewer. It was because she had a concrete trench in the back of the house that led out from the bathroom. Every time we flushed the toilet, the waste traveled the trench to a field in the back of her house. She also had a henhouse full of mama hens and their chicks. Next to it was a pigpen, but it didn't house a pig. The pen housed a huge hog that weighed about 800 pounds. I guess the combination of all this just made grandma's house stink!

When we arrived, Grandma was in the backyard chasing a hen.

"What are you doing, Grandma?" I asked.

"Trying to catch dinner," she replied.

I almost fainted when she said that, and I begged her, "Please, Grandma, don't kill the hen. She probably

has baby chicks to take care of and they still need their mama."

"Well then, what do you suggest we have for dinner, *Prieta Chocolate?*" That was what Grandma used to call me.

"Rice and beans with tortillas will be just fine with me," I told her.

She obliged, walked into the house, and called me in to help her.

"Well, *Prieta*, what do you want to make? *¿El arroz o las tortillas?*"

Since she was determined not to let us forget our heritage, and we hardly spoke Spanish, she always spoke to us in Spanish and English. I didn't know how to make Mexican rice, so I chose to make the tortillas. Of course, she had to help me make the *masa* (tortilla dough) since I only knew how to make "*gringo*" tortillas, as she put it. At home, Mom and I used Crisco, but she used *Manteca* (pork lard), which she swore made them taste better and stated that a true Mexican used nothing else. Anyway, we prepared dinner, and we all sat down to eat. After dinner my dad told my mom that he was going to go run some errands with his brothers John and Nick, and they would be back in about an hour. My mom gave him a look that said she did not want him to go, but she went along with his plans so as not to start trouble. He kissed her on the cheek and left.

Two hours later, my dad and his brothers returned laughing and being loud. We, Mom, Grandma and my sisters were in the kitchen reading, talking, and having a good time. I went to the spare bedroom, which was between the kitchen and the living room to check on my baby brother, Peter. I heard my dad and his brothers arguing, so I ran to the kitchen to tell Mom. She immediately rushed to the living room to see what was going on, but tried to make it seem like she wasn't

snooping. As soon as she got to the living room my uncles got quiet but greeted her. She asked if they wanted anything to eat or drink and they said no. Daddy told her they were fine and just hanging out, so Mom just smiled and went back to the kitchen.

“You need to learn your place and stay out of men’s business,” Grandma told her.

“I just asked them if they wanted something to eat or drink,” Mom replied.

Then, we heard Daddy yell and a loud crash. We ran to the living room and saw Daddy and his brothers fighting. We screamed for them to stop, but they continued fighting.

“I am the man of my house and I’ll be damned if I have to get my wife’s permission to go anywhere,” yelled Daddy.

“Well, then why did you say you had to go tell Juana that you were going out again?” Uncle Nick yelled.

“I just wanted her to know where I was going so that she wouldn’t worry. I was not going to ask her for permission,” Daddy shouted back.

“A man doesn’t have to tell his wife anything. If he’s the head of his household, then he can do and say whatever the hell he wants. So letting your wife know that you are going out is what a whipped man does?” Uncle Nick yelled.

With that said, Daddy jumped up, punched Uncle Nick in the mouth, grabbed him, threw him on the floor, and kept whaling on him.

Grandma yelled at Uncle John to get Daddy off of Uncle Nick and to hold him down while she got her rifle.

“I did not raise my sons to act like animals and I will not have a son acting like that. Rabid animals get shot and killed and if you, Pedro, want to act like a raging animal, then I’m going to kill you.”

Mom screamed to me, “*Mija*, call 911! Hurry!”

I ran to the phone, called 911 and told the dispatcher that my uncles were beating my Daddy up and that Grandma was getting her rifle to shoot him. My uncle John heard me, grabbed the phone out of my hand and told the dispatcher that everything was fine and hung up.

“*Mija*, run to Uncle Tom’s and tell him to come help us,” Mom shouted.

Uncle Tom lived about five houses away, so I ran as fast as I could and told him what was happening. He ran back to the house with me and said that everything would be fine. He lied!

When we got back to the house, Mom was yelling at Grandma not to hurt my Daddy. I screamed when I saw Grandma loading her rifle and yelled at Uncle John to stop her. Just as she raised the rifle to shoot Daddy, Mom let out a blood-curdling scream and stood in front of Grandma. Grandma reached up on the wall, grabbed a horse whip and told mom to move or she would whip her good.

“*¡No, María, tu no vas a matar a mi esposo, tu hijo! Él es el padre de mis hijos y tu no les vas a quitar su padre.*” (No, Maria, you are not going to kill my husband, your son. He is my children’s father and you will not take their father away.) Mom yelled at her.

Uncle John, hearing this, turned and reached toward Grandma, grabbed the rifle out of her hands and took the bullets out.

“*Mamá*, we will take care of it. Don’t be stupid,” he shouted.

Meanwhile, Uncle Nick and Uncle Tom were hitting Daddy. Yes, Uncle Tom, the one who was supposed to help us and who told me that everything would be fine was helping with the beating. After putting the rifle away, Uncle John joined in. He and Uncle Tom each grabbed one of Daddy’s arms and held him while Uncle Nick punched him in the face and stomach. Mom and

my sisters were still screaming and Mom tried to get to Daddy, but Grandma started hitting her. While this was happening, I saw the ambulance coming and yelled that help was here. Everyone turned around and looked at me.

“Go tell them everything is fine. Do not let them get down and come to the house. Tell them you made a mistake and that you are sorry. Make them believe you or they will see what has happened and your Daddy will go to jail,” Uncle John told me.

I looked at Mom and she told me to do what he said.

Sobbing, I walked out to the street and waited for the ambulance to turn around; they had passed the house. I wiped my tears and cleared my throat. When they stopped in front of the house I said, “Hi, I’m sorry but I made a crank call just to test the emergency number. Everything is fine here. Thank you for coming.”

I turned around and started to walk back when a man called me back.

“Young lady, are you sure everything is okay?”

“Yes sir,” I said.

“Then why have you been crying? I can see your eyes and nose are red like you’ve been crying.”

I turned around and looked back toward the house to see if anyone was watching. Uncle John was looking out the small window on the door. I turned back to the man and told him that I had gotten in trouble for playing with the phone.

“Well, I am going to get down and check the house to make sure everything is fine,” he said.

My heart jumped because I did not want my Daddy to get in trouble and go to jail. Suddenly, Uncle John came running out and said that everything was fine. He said he and his brothers had been horsing around and that my Daddy hit his nose and couldn’t stop the bleeding. However, everything was fine now that the bleeding had

stopped. The paramedic said okay and left. I looked at Uncle John and told him that he was going to hell for lying. He just laughed at me and told me to go inside.

When I walked back inside, Daddy was lying on the couch with his head on Mom’s lap and had an ice pack on his face along with a cold towel behind his neck. He looked at me with sadness in his eyes.

“*Mija*, everything is going to be okay and I’m sorry that you all had to see that. Better yet, I’m sorry that we grown men fought like animals. Please forgive me for putting you all through this nightmare.”

I just ran to him, hugged him and cried. I looked at Grandma and my uncles and told them, “I hate every single one of you and will for the rest of my life! I never want to see you all again!”

I then looked at Mom and told her it was time to go. However, Dad was in no condition to drive and Mom didn’t know how to drive but was willing to try. We all got into the car and started home, but the car broke down just a block away from Grandma’s. I had to walk back to tell Uncle John what had happened and that Mom needed help. He drove me back, pushed our car into a church parking lot, had us pile into his car, and he took us home. When we got home, he walked Daddy into the house and put him to bed. My mom thanked him and he sarcastically replied, “No problem. It’s the least I could do.”

I wanted to run up to him and beat him, but I knew I couldn’t. So I yelled at him: “Get out! I hate you and don’t ever come back! I will never forgive you, Uncle Nick and Uncle Tom, for beating my Daddy up! I will never forgive Grandma for almost killing my Daddy!”

He didn’t say a word. He just turned and walked out.

Andrew J. Smiley

Aroostook

I am from
 A land between two skies
 Flowing with salt and vinegar
 Sprinkled with the living pepper
 Of ancient surnames and grafted branches
 Where honor smells like fresh-cut pine, sweat, and
 machine oil
 On old men who dream dreams on apple-counting
 porches
 As young men build wings of wax and feathers.

In Aroostook
 Equinoxes burn with deciduous pleasure in the hills
 Matched at midnight
 By the light that slides from red to blue
 On effervescent whips crackling above the tops of fir
 and spruce;
 Fiddleheads greening in the dappled moss
 Hear the chickadee call on shady grey outhouse tops,
 Iron lampposts throw diamond-scattered paths
 Across the frosty Neverland embracing
 Campbell's General Store;
 "Can't get theah from heah,
 I've got a bone to pick with you,
 Ayuh..."

In Aroostook
 Hot Wheels and Cornflakes
 Scratch across the hand-tooled breakfast table
 Through a phalanx of plastic men turned saints by
 morning's glory;
 Forests of greasy work-worn tools hang in the shed
 Watching as the sawmill roof drops in
 While we make a gala of potato salad, beans, chowder
 and Martinelli's on the lawn;
 "Bert and I went down to the docks at four 'o'clock in
 the morning,
 Should head to Kennebunkport come spring,
 Gads, but fuel oil's gettin' expensive..."

Aroostook,
 My love for you is polar
 Strengthened by my constant gimballs
 And the ethereal umbilical I have braided since my
 birth;
 I stand a copper-green colossus, one foot in each-
 The Homeland/The Pilgrimage
 You are the dust that hovers in my eyes,
 Visible by intention
 Hazy by distance
 Lovely from the want.

Literary Criticism

Andrew J. Smiley

A Feminist Analysis of Carolyn Poulter's "More on Fruit"

"She spent the next lifetime
trying to explain.
He had asked for it, picked
her right off the tree.
Let me see it, he said 5

and then bit in, only
she was the one left
bleeding. It is this way
in any garden,
any eventual paradise 10

tainted by the leaving and lies
we tell ourselves to move on.
The serpent never was
such a big deal. It was
hunger she answered." 15

This poem challenges male conventions of power and redefines the feminine experience in a number of ways. On a surface level, it is a thin allegory of the Eden story told from a different perspective (a persecuted one), and it challenges the convention that Eve provoked the proverbial fall from grace. Secondly, it is a play on the traditional Biblical convention of Eve's Penance, and thirdly, it is a garden of symbolism that references the subversion and repression of women and feminine culture. Poulter is clear in her indictment of male power: it goes back to the mythical garden, where women first received the cultural stigma (at least according to a

Biblical viewpoint) that would define them for millennia.

The poem can first be read as a feminist viewpoint of the Eden story: descriptors of fruit, paradise, egression, a serpent, and the “next lifetime” (line 1) all refer back to the classic myth of the First Man and his Wife. As the first chapter of Genesis would describe it to us, Adam was created first, but was pronounced incomplete by his creator. Eve was created for him and named by him, therefore receiving both her identity and her purpose from male authority figures. She was brought into existence to be his completion, or in a similar definition, to serve his needs. This is reinforced in the first two lines, where the woman (who must not only represent Eve, but womankind in general, and the narrator herself) spends mortality after Eden trying to be reconciled to her imperfect companion. This can be read as trying to bridge the gap between male and female through the means of communication, or simply trying in vain to explain that she is not to blame for humankind’s separation from God, and the only logical way out of a static story (the Garden) was by the Fall.

In Poulter’s vision of Eden, it is actually Adam who tastes of the Forbidden Fruit first, signifying an initiation sexual in nature that is portrayed as destructive to Eve, for he is the one who “picks” “sees” and “bites” her, and she is left “bleeding” (lines 3, 5, 6, and 8, respectively). First intercourse is an experience that is inevitably violent in the female psyche, as the woman bridges the gap between ‘innocent’ and ‘initiated’ both mentally and physically. The poem describes pleasure or satisfaction for Adam, while Eve is left with pain and blood and emptiness. This is emptiness that has still not been completely filled since Eden, when woman’s eyes were opened and she first realized she was in thrall to man.

The narrator’s rejection of the story fabricated from the beginning is a refusal to buy into the lie of Eve’s

Penance, the concept that all women bear the burden of guilt at having been the gender to demonstrate weakness and submit to the temptations of the Serpent. This is why the narrator says of the serpent that it “never was/such a big deal” (lines 13 and 14), it was never temptation at all, but a “hunger” (line 15). This hunger can represent Adam’s carnal impulses being satisfied, or a hunger of woman’s own that was intimidating enough to earn her his contempt and scorn. Her implied refusal to submit to Adam is reminiscent of the early Christian mythology of Lilith, Adam’s ‘first’ wife who refused to submit to Adam’s desires and was cursed to be an outcast mother of humanity’s tormentors on the shores of the Red Sea.

There is a great deal of latent symbolism in the poem, starting with the images of a garden and the Tree itself. Deciduous trees typically bear the majority of mankind’s edible fruit, and trees of this type can be viewed as a combination of yonic and phallic imagery, possessing both a phallus (the trunk) and a yonic roundness (the womb-like canopy, of which the fruit, or ovae, are a part). The man “picks” her (line 3), symbolic of both taking her from a place of stagnant safety (Eden, the womb, girlhood, etc.) and impregnation by the ‘possession’ of one of her fruits, or ovae. “Let me see it,” he says in line 5, intimating the curiosity man has for the body of the female and her creative powers, but since he is a spectator to the miraculous process of pregnancy and birth, he can only ‘know’ by invasive sexual means that cause woman, Eve, and the narrator to “bleed” (line 8). Pregnancy is imagery of roundness, flowering, fertility, and growth, all associated with garden metaphors. A woman’s generative organs are her source of power and femininity, and the allusion to being “picked” implies a sense of both rape and sterility, harvested from the source of life to which she is intimately connected.

The narrator describes the garden as “any eventual

paradise” (line 10), signifying that it is a state experienced by most women, but not one that lasts, as it becomes “tainted by the leaving” and the “lies/we tell ourselves to move on” (lines 11 and 12). Egression from Eden is and was inevitable, as women grow into their power and paradoxically find it suppressed and repressed in a world that has been defined by a male sense of power. Here, the poem’s final lines seem to have a despondent quality, a sense that while much is changing in the world’s view of women, much is not changing. It is not the serpent that is to blame; it is Adam.

“More On Fruit” seems to represent the narrator’s frustration with the sense that women are defined by such a lack of power in the world, while it represents a powerful demeaning experience that is deeply personal in nature. Though women possess the seeds of life within their bodies, and have the capacity to change, grow physically with pregnancy and mentally with wisdom, though they have the ability to be fruitful and multiply, they still remain on the fringes of influence, often helpless against male power that allows them no choices.