MARY OF THE ROSES

Oh, I know we see her small, almost a child, one more forgiving victim, but suppose it was not like that at all. Suppose she was a tall woman, let's say six foot two, and built like a Michelangelo statue, hands thick as potatoes, with veins like great rivers.

Suppose she had seen what the little boys wagged behind the bushes, and could roar like a lion at a good joke, her laughing hair shaking all the way to her knees.

Suppose her back was tough as bark, sunbranded dark as the blood rose. Not like the painted white ladies in museums with skins soft as wet napkins. As she balanced a full jug on her head she sang with a knowing kind of woman sadness and danced with big wide feet and big wide hips and big loose joints so the water swirled round and round in the clay, now and then catching the air with its wings.

And one day her eyes rebellious and black as ripe grapes while hauling water from the stream she lifted her skirts to fan herself a bit, and seeing she was alone slipped off her clothes and stepped into the current, letting her laughter roll out of her mouth like thunder, wetting the springy tendrils of black hair at the sweaty nape of her neck.

And suppose the angel was sent thirsty and fainting over all the earth, searching for someone who could love without anything miraculous about it, woman of the ordinary shoes, and there by the stream he found her startled, laughing, naked rising unashamed from the water, her breasts like suds slipping wet over her folded arms, and he cried out with love for her, and the sound of his cry filled the desert with roses.

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