

## Premonition

*- After reading the back page of a newspaper in Utah, October 2002.*

Because a woman's body was sighted in a well,  
a masked sniper took out a line of children on Halloween  
who were contained along the edge of the lawn  
inside the fencing, peering through slats at the woman's body  
a murmur inside their rock-split knees.

Some can see her kneeling  
in children's eyes in mortuaries -  
as he unzips the body bags, we scan highways  
to find the well where she is hiding in a ball,  
tracing codes inside her kidney stones,  
something to leave behind, heavy loaves  
for the bread of the world.

When the medics arrived at the well, she had vanished;  
we are crossing the four corners  
for her footprints in shifting dunes, where she is not  
in smoke stacks over Shiprock,  
power plants behind fruit trees,  
though I wear the diesel of them on my clothes,  
trace the smell of her steaming up from the stains.

And though we follow her moans in the wind, she is not  
lying wide on her back on the mesa where we cross  
towards her, still not located, she is not  
in twin-rock mines where copper shales  
press beneath our heels into a diagram of a breast,  
where the slit of sun, for a moment, is warm enough to hear her -  
a moth whispered on shoulders, though when we ask,  
there is no answer, we don't know where  
north is from here, where we ought to stop,  
if it is her edifice that faces us - butterflies  
flattened against trailer homes.

She is not north of these cliffs where the fire lives,  
where you are that small bundle of child,  
stomach heaving with ash, nearly dropped  
on the rock of our heart, but captured  
smoldering in our breath,  
because you are the body  
of silenced bones we sing for,  
your words on our tongue like a wafer;

she is not on the side of highways, singing,  
on the steaming black line in the desert where we pass  
with windows rolled down, vultures above us,

arcing towards the woman in a body bag of burlap  
still breathing beneath blood's dust blanket;

she is not there where a woman at the laundry line  
ripples into a mirage behind us,  
where bottles on roadsides through sand glimmer  
like shards of sunlight on water; we swim  
in our blue dreams until dry, collapse  
pale into body bags, prisms along the highway;

she is not at the vanishing point  
in the rearview mirror, where a woman hangs her child  
in dry wind, its loose skin on the line because  
they are hungry: it is 200 miles to the next house  
as we pass them, eyes closed, not turning back;

and she is not within the wooden slat hut over the arroyo  
where wind blows through, though an aroma of fresh bread  
rises from the pipe in the roof, drifts west  
towards the woman in her chimney of charcoal  
lighting matches inside the dark rock smudged  
by cartographers across the ember of sun -  
they mask with ink the wideness  
where we are not located,  
even after the wide crossing we take to arrive.

What is the direction of the timeshadow  
unfolding down the moonlit sidewalk  
towards the man on the bench  
with a blade in his pocket?

Waiting at the periphery of the streetlight,  
a woman makes a phone call because it is late  
and she has been awake since the ice broke  
over branches, the wings in hay rose yellow-tipped  
into the new sun whose long shadows already told  
of the well and the woman in it,

and because we cannot find her,  
we grind corn inside the caves,  
gather the flint to spark the rain,  
milk ravens, and round speckled eggs  
in the backs of our mouths, even though, in the smog  
only slain birds are hatched,  
even though in our song we are tongueless  
calling towards the moon for her  
on the banks of a river silver with oil  
where we are warm between legs, sweet  
with yeast, a rising breast of thrashed spelt,  
heavy loaves for the bread of the world,

so they will have something of her  
on the hot stones  
when they arrive at the shore line  
looking for food.

And we cannot stop searching,  
households boarded up for the open road,  
dirty pots left on the stove,  
eyelids creased with obituaries of our sisters  
and children, reduced to letters  
smeared with grease,  
half-tones on pages of newsprint  
torn into strips for papermache projects  
in kindergarten class,  
where the ghosts of children are painting masks  
for the Halloween parade -

we have each hung our bodies on the line  
while passing by the signs,  
have thinned into newspaper  
headlines, reading: *world hunger*,  
and as the stones in our stomach harden,  
we turn to feast between knuckle bones,  
seal our premonition inside Styrofoam -

her menses displayed on a plastic tray:  
a sale tag secures us  
behind the sniper's mask.

When I woke I did not tell you that I dreamt last night  
of chicken thighs, speckled skin wrapped around the knee joint,  
how they were scuttling, headless, over my breast  
and that is why I've studded my ears today with aquamarine,  
can only speak about blue things,  
the woman in the blue shirt, the blue  
October sky, the blue silk on the woman's laundry line  
flapping against a blue breath, the bluishness of a body  
when it is turning cold, the blue memory of the desert  
littered with smashed glass pieces, bottle caps,  
shells, squares of sunlight on water,  
the absence of her, glimmering  
when we are not located,  
passing across the mesa, hungry,  
scanning the road for kill,

for the well the children know  
of raven's milk. Time  
shadows across stone.

*Jennifer Foerster*