

LOUISE HALFE

## Antelope Canyon, Arizona

A Navajo guide explained that the canyon will devour  
People during unexpected flash floods. Flat sandstone bleeds  
into ribbons of orange, yellow and red that twisted and swirled on this  
desert rock. I saw no canyon where the guide stood. Uncomprehending  
I saw my husband disappear into a slip within the earth. I followed,  
Still not digesting that we had entered my mother's womb.  
The walls contracted and we held our breathe as we squeezed  
Between the swollen desires, and walked the canals' long and windy gut.  
Occasionally a sunbeam broke through the upper mouths  
and we stood haloed inside a uterine cave.

I wonder what the eye of my husband's musical organ sees when  
He enters my cave. A lodge of pulsing membrane, rivers of orange mud,  
And walls of flames, this contraction of squeezing hallways birthing his  
Juicy froth, the intoxication rushing as if a salmon's spawn swimming  
toward their hibernation. My blossom a butterfly wing fluttering and  
closing, grasping, gasping for this breath.

We followed the long valley of the canyon's trail and climb upward to  
Spill against the ground. At this vaginal past lay open the large molars  
Of the canyon's distant walk. In labored breath we walked in silence  
Having been struck by the lightening of our birth.

## Mechanic

There is not much to say  
About a brother I never had.

In residential school he bent to tie my laces,  
his fingers  
Blue from the wind.  
In the dining room he crept up to my table  
And left a sucker beside me.  
At home he drew a jack-in-the-bean stalk  
Hopscotch so I would never win.  
Later he had me gallop  
Between his legs.  
Behind the door my cousin tried to collect  
A few pennies from him.

So yes, I don't have much to say.

When we were going without food and water,  
Hibernating in the forest lamenting,  
The sugar chewed off both his legs,  
Ate his kidneys and took his breath.  
This March when wind blew snow across  
The road, I lifted tobacco  
Offered him a birthday present.

That night deep in my slumber  
Otâ by my bed  
He arrived with the thump of a rabbit  
Shifted his foot  
Had his little dance and left.

## Sentinels – ê-kwêskît

Awoken from the sleeping forest  
I listened to an arrival, wâhyaw ê takosin,  
I listened  
from far away this arrival of souls – ahcahkwak  
their moccasins drummed from a shuffle  
to the prairie chicken's grass dance. They arrived from  
wâwâhtêw, a trail of brilliant night dancers nîmihitocik,  
the swish of a skirt, a man's rabbit thump.  
Yes, here, otâ. In my bedroom.  
Nisto pisim, three months, many nights they'd  
Wake my slumber. Finally, I asked  
What was it they wanted. Always  
I met their muteness.

I travelled to the red baked soil  
Where the midnight people with long decorated earlobes  
Wore beaded metal chokers and wrapped plaid shawls  
Around their graceful slenderness.  
I travelled still among the relatives who ate  
Guts and heads of animals, beetles, scorpions and sea urchins  
Sold dehydrated snakes, bladders and herbs.  
They clogged not only their streets, but the air  
I inhaled. Still,  
I burned incense at their temples, honored their gods  
And spoke to my Creator.  
Not done with my roaming  
I watched Mount Etna spew  
Our car round the curves of skin-tight streets and  
roved the full breasted hills of Sicily never certain  
where the roads would go.

Months later when all was still  
In the thick forest of dreams I woke to the joyous  
Drum-beat of dancers, they arrived  
Faster than what I remember, here, quickly, otâ  
By my bed.

When the last leaf fell my ancient mother,  
Told my sisters and I  
“nēstosin. I am so tired.”  
Her journey a landscape of sugar-beet fields,  
Chicken-scratches and beer-parlor terrors  
On her soft deerskin face.  
The last small wind blew slow and gentle,  
Carried her as she planted a smoking rose  
On all our mouths.