

Quilts - Nikki Giovanni

for Sally Sellers

Like a fading piece of cloth

I am a failure

No longer do I cover tables filled with food and laughter

My seams are frayed my hems falling my strength no longer able

To hold the hot and cold

I wish for those first days

When just woven I could keep water

From seeping through

Repelled stains with the tightness of my weave

Dazzled the sunlight with my

Reflection

I grow old though pleased with my memories

The tasks I can no longer complete

Are balanced by the love of the tasks gone past

I offer no apology only

this plea:

When I am frayed and strained and drizzle at the end

Please someone cut a square and put me in a quilt

That I might keep some child warm

And some old person with no one else to talk to

Will hear my whispers

And cuddle

near

Mirror - Sylvia Plath

I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.
Whatever I see I swallow immediately
Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike.
I am not cruel, only truthful ,
The eye of a little god, four-cornered.
Most of the time I meditate on the opposite wall.
It is pink, with speckles. I have looked at it so long
I think it is part of my heart. But it flickers.
Faces and darkness separate us over and over.

Now I am a lake. A woman bends over me,
Searching my reaches for what she really is.
Then she turns to those liars, the candles or the moon.
I see her back, and reflect it faithfully.
She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands.
I am important to her. She comes and goes.
Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness.
In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman
Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish.

Carolyn Forché - Photograph of My Room

after Walker Evans

Thirty years from now, you might
hold this room in your hands.
So that you will not wonder:
the china cups are from Serbia
where a man filled them with plum
wine and one night talked
of his life with the partisans
and in prison, his life
as a poet, Slavko, his life
as if it could not have been otherwise.
The quilt was Anna's.
There are swatches taken
from her own clothes, curtains
that hung in a kitchen in Prague,
aprons she never took off
in all her years in America.
Since her death, the stitches,
one scrap to another
have come loose.
The bundle of army letters
were sent from Southeast Asia
during '67, kept near a bottle
of vodka drained by a woman
in that same year who wanted
only to sleep; the fatigues

were his, it is she
whom I now least resemble.
In the trunk, the white eyelet
and cheap lace of underthings,
a coat that may have belonged
to a woman who approached me
on a street in April
saying, as it was spring,
would I spare her a smoke?
Under the bed, a pouch of money:
pesetas, dinar, francs, the coins
of no value in any other place.
In the notebooks you will find
those places: the damp inner thighs,
the delicate rash left by kisses,
fingers on the tongue, a swallow
of brandy, a fire.
It is all there, the lies
told to myself because of Paris,
the stories I believed in Salvador
and Granada, and every so often
simply the words calling back
a basket of lemons and eggs,
a bowl of olives.
Wrapped in a tissue you will find
a bullet, as if from the rifle
on the wall, spooned from the flesh
of a friend who must have thought
it was worth something.

Latched to its shell, a lattice
of muscle. *One regime*
is like another said the face
of a doctor who slid
the bullet from the flat
of his blade to my hands saying
this one won't live to the morning.
In the black cheese crock
are the ashes, flecked
with white slivers of bone,

that should have been scattered
years ago, but the thing
did not seem possible.
The rest of the room remains
a mystery, as it was
in the shutter of memory
that was 1936, when it belonged
to someone already dead, someone
who has no belongings.

Cornelius Eady - Jemima's Do-Rag

I crown her secret, the hair
The world seems to dread.
At night, alone, after work has loosened
Its grip, and the muscles of her smile
Can relax, at the dresser, beside the
Washbasin, down comes the beauty
They try so hard to bind.

I hear there's a man on the street,
Eyes dead as marbles, dodging
The law. They say his cap is made
Of wool. If he sleeps, I bet he dreams
Like we do, scalp uncoiled, nobody's helper,
No one's aunt.