

Brian Carey Chung

SIGNS IN THE BACKYARD



O papaya tree fertility goddess for heaven
 where is my mother?

I have waited in the yard a whole heap of sunrises,
 until I swear
the banana tree is Moses coming down the mountain
 with a commandment
of bananas, telling me to lighten up myself and laugh.
 Her grapefruit tree
must be her Chini joke for the Burning Bush: its shag
 aflame with yellow
fruit exploding amid the bitter vines of cerasse.
 I have come to
in a shed of primordial ferns, sorrel, scotch bonnet,
 juvenile bizzy nut,
amid barbecue grills, African violets, soursop,
 watching the crawl
of pumpkin tendrils hug a lone breadfruit on a table.
 I have come knocking
like sun on a fluxy mango useless unheard too late.
 If death were a field
of sugarcane, I am a mongoose burning a trail through
 its snake-ridden heart

 Imagined or real,
at home and abroad, I wait for answers in this yard.
 Yesterdays' renal
failures Angelou Hallmark cards rotting fruit of progress,

an inward journey
manifested as water retention. And who's to say
private progress must
come through hospital monitors as "normal?" Hepatic
failure critical and not
good better hour. I try to shift my howling mother.
Two teaspoons of urine
in three days is all that can be risen. She wakes to what
she never said this is.
This is a slow drowning over months. The monitor's beep
is a garbage truck
in reverse, and she jokes, *who do they think they are taking
to the dumps?*, back in the room.
The only relief is to stand. No standing either.
Where I am, sunlight
forces to the interior of a pumpkin blossom

Game face Needle torture
NPO Nothing By Mouth Nothing by land or sea either.
how how how or help?
I cannot tell if my mother is trying to ask me
how, or if she's reaching
between great intervals of breath for the rough cords of help
disappearing.
Unable to find a healthy vein. Tears before mind can
acknowledge its cry.
Compartmentalizing dread into little logic cubes.
So much bloating now,
bending is implausible. Aromatherapy
hurts. Too much pain
to be touched. Withdrawn from the self-administered pain pump.
wow wow wow
I stand on my head. I am tied to an invisible tree.
No more lying down now.
She wakes, opens her eyes wide, smiles, seeing me, says, *Hi, Brian!*

I go back through her flowers to when she asked if I knew
of a way to help her
breathe better. Imagine! Us there everlastingly tied
like punished gods
to the rock, to life. She—circling the island unwilling to leave
deliriously calling out
Jamaica, Jamaica, Jamaica—changed to bird of prey
waiting for the body,
the dark matter, to feast. —when she died no longer looking
like my mother,
but someone else's, like that first bright morning when they

took her away from
her mother to clean her up, and switched her with another,
and we lost our baby....

When we peered down into the carriage, we all had our doubts.

What was there to do
but believe that frown was hers? —as though she went disapproving
of life, her arms crossed
against it, clutching a rattle of freshly cut roses.

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