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Poems by Minnie Bruce Pratt

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Poems by Minnie Bruce Pratt

Oconeechee Mountain

My mother always said
make the most of what you've got.
So the year I lived in the country
I had as friends only
those aloof and undemanding acquaintances
true and false soloman's seal
purple blazing star
the red-shouldered hawk.
I conjugated only
with Ovid and my husband
manipulated my breasts
to toughen them for babies
and, flank jammed against
that of the hill above the Eno,
masturbated as unselfconsciously as Eve
watching the ferns uncurl above my face,
the sun govern in slow degrees
the unfolding of elm and trillium.

Rape

At four in the morning I hear
her scream again.
This time he holds the knife
to her throat in the park
behind my house where leaves
darken for the fall.
She offers thirty-two cents.
He wants all.
When the police come they don't
find no screaming
lady search the creepers
at next light
find no body left
but the corpse
of my fear clutching the phone
on the desk and wait

for her to scream again
at ten in the morning
down by the creek it's Sue
taken fishing by her grand-
father, raped and hooked
by him with pain
in the fall, in the early
afternoon
watching the bees bloom
in the sasanquas
I hear my lover scream
in Kansas City
where he holds the knife close
to her white throat
where she fights while blood drips
from her ears to the floor
behind a barracks door
slammed in Germany
Sue hesitates to scream,
to create a stir,
a racist scene over the black
GI beating
off his load of rage
in her
final report of the day
I hear Beth
typing the women who've sat
in her office, their lives
bleeding from the mouth, their sides
swollen with incest,
they slide into the metal
file drawers
while Beth feels them murmur and cry
in the cabinet of her heart
Mesia measures the red
for Holofernes'
head and paints revenge
for her rape and death,
paints Judith alive with the knife
in the shadows of midnight
I wake to my lover's scream
this time in my arms
he holds the knife to her throat.
Her scars bleed.
I think of Holofernes'
bleeding head.

I hold a knife to his throat.
I hold her.
We watch the dark night pass.
The door is locked.
We hear the step. He holds
the knife to her throat.
I hold her scarred. I hold
her in my arms.

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Ora

My grandmother is dying.
She writhes and yells
as they bathe her.
She said that she never felt
like anyone until she married.
She was such a lady.
She would be embarrassed
to see herself now.
I saw her wedding yesterday
from behind a fence of cardboard placards.
I wore blue jeans, the crowd wore fur,
and she was swathed
in veils of ivory illusion.
They aimed a machinegun at us
from the steeple and cheered
as she edged past into the house
on the arm of the President.
We were chanting for justice
for U.S. prisoners when the words
rolled into her name:
Ora, heart of gold,
you let down your silver hair
for us to comb and grasp.
You wound it into braids
for your crown.
Your arthritic fingers crackled
as you combed the wool
and pieced our comforts.
Your head is shorn now
but I never thought
you would die.
The seam that you have sewn
stretches even and fine.