

language.

The writer has to tell. It is the weapon I know how to use.

Dear Diary, did you give her what she needs? Did you back away in horror at the pain of her life? Did you open beneath her to receive the blows of her

testimony? Did you wrap your pages around her incest-battered body? Did you

make her feel clean again, innocent?

Yellow paper, please give me what I need.

Pen, be my strength.

If love could be made visible, would it be on the skins of trees, this paper spread out beneath my hands?

Who will heal the healer? Dennis Maracle

Love as piercing as the screwdriver's thrust.

Love as searing as the marks on an infant's leg.

Love as clear as her face.

Love as clean as a sheet of yellow paper.

Love as honest as a poem.

I have to tell.

It is the only thing I know how to do.

1989

Toronto, Canada

Honour Song

I will listen to you

For every ear that turned away from your story, I will finely tune
my own to hear every syllable, every cry, every nuance of speech,
every whisper, every secret.

I give you what you have given me

I will touch you

For every hand that failed you in gentleness, my own will become
birds to lift your tired body into flight, will become water to
bathe your wounds, will become caresses to ease your spirit into
calm.

I give you what you have given me.

I will believe you.

For every time they called you liar, I will trust your honesty, I
will be faithful to your words, I will be a sentinel of your story.
I give you what you have given me.

I will see you.

For every eye that glanced away, that refused to look, my own eyes
will behold beauty, will reflect our history, will softly cover you
with respect.

I give you what you have given me.

I will stand with you.

For every war that rages against you, I will be on your side. I
will be as a warrior beside you, I will fight with you.

I give you what you have given me.

I will laugh with you.

For every insult and curse thrown down at you, I will throw it back and
turn it into a joke on them. I will tell you gossip and dirty
stories that cause laughter to rumble from your gut.
I give you what you have given me.

I will cry with you.

For all the ugliness you were witness to, I will shed tears for
each one. I will cry for lost babies, for lost language,
for unnamed sufferings. I will cry and my tears will fall on you and
you will feel them and know I am with you.
I give you what you have given me.

I will love you.

I have so much and I give it to you humbly, respectfully,
honestly.

I will love you as you have loved me.

Our love will turn over this earth.

Our love will be a seed.

Our love will be a flower, will be fruit.

Our love will be food for our Nations.

I give to you what you have always given me.

I sing your names aloud to honour you.

Mary, Celeste, Vickie, Connie, Nicole, Doreen, Janice, Elaine,
Doris, Donna, Viola, Dorothy, Jan, Karen, Margaret, Chrystos,
Katsi, Elizabeth, Monique, Muriel, Lisa, Gloria, Joanne, Carole,
Susan, Cindy, Beverly, Anna, Maureen, Littlefeather, Kate, Betty,
Judith, Terri, Raven, Nila, Share, Midnight Sun, Jackie, Awiakta,
Barbara, Linda, Edith, Deb, Marcy, Leslie, Lee Anne, Jeannie,
Redwing, Diane, Sharon, Sandra, Charlotte, Linda.

I sing your names aloud to honour you.
I give to you what you have always given me.
My sisters.
I sing this honour song for you.

1991, 1994

Stillborn Night

Wind.

Outside my suite, wind screams.

There is no rain, unless my tears can be called so.

I have heard over the wires, the phone held weakly—

My fourth grandson is dead.

Unable to make the journey of birth, he has become a spirit.

I am unable to be with my daughter, my son-in-law, my grandson that lives.

The wind. The wind has cut power lines, has uprooted trees, has cancelled flights. But the ringing of the telephone remains constant.

Through the wires, I hold my family. Voice becomes the means to love and comfort

My daughter cries—"Mama, why did he have to die?"

Tim cries—"Mom, I'm scared."

And I think about the careless words that are said by people when a baby has not completed the passage to this world.

"You'll have another one, you're young and healthy." "It's better this way."

I can only say—"I love you". "I know you're scared." "I'll be home as soon as I can." "I don't know why he died." "I will miss him too."

But I did know that he would die. All these months—I knew—and I curse this knowing and want to scream like the wind outside my suite.

My immediate thoughts are for my daughter—how to ease her pain,

wanting to take that pain and absorb it for her, my lovely daughter.

This is what a mother wants to do.

The grandmother wants the impossible.

To hold a baby in her arms. To rock him. To sing to him.

To imagine the first time he looks at me in recognition and smiles at

his grandma.

I bought no baby clothes, no rattles, none of the little things

that signal the celebration of a new being. I assembled no medicine

bag for him, no filling the pouch with gifts to keep him strong and

balanced in his journey of life.

I told myself I was being careful. This had been a difficult and

dangerous pregnancy. I was being careful, I told myself. I did not

want to presume the outcome.

But when I wandered through stores, I would go to the baby clothes

and hold them in my hands, fingering colours. I picked up rattles

and shook them, then lay them down. I looked at tiny shirts and

diapers, smelled baby powders. I wanted to wonder if this baby

would have thick, fine black hair like his brother, Benjamin.

I wanted to wonder what the mixture of Tyendinaga and Kanawake would

produce this time. He was to be named Brant Montour, family names of

the grandmothers of this child.

I bought no baby clothes. I kept this secret of knowing from everyone, even the woman who shares my bed and my life.

I went with my daughter to doctor's offices. Went with her to have tests. She talked of looking forward to being home again, not having to go to work, looking forward to the night feedings, the smell of baby's head, Benjamin's reactions to having a baby brother, the solidifying of a