

Four Portraits of Fire

By Lorna Dee Cervantes

1

I find a strange knowledge of wind,
an open door in the mountain
pass where everything intersects.
Believe me. This will not pass.
This is a world where flags
contain themselves, and are still,
marked by their unfurled edges.
Lean stuff sways on the boughs
of pitch pine: silver, almost tinsel,
all light gone blue and sprouting
orange oils in a last bouquet.

2

These were the nest builders;
I caught one last morning, I sang
so it fell down, stupid,
from the trees. They're so incorrect
in their dead skin. Witness their twig
feet, the mistake of their hands.
They will follow you. They yearn
pebbles for their gullets to grind
their own seed. They swallow
so selflessly and die
like patriots.

3

Last Christmas, a family of five
woke from their dreaming and
dreamed themselves over: the baby
in its pink pajamas, the boy
in the red flannel bathrobe
he grabbed from the door,
a mother, a father, and a sister
in curlers; all died.

A wood frame house,
a cannister of oil,
a match—watch
as it unsettles.
They were so cold;
umber.

4

I am away from the knowledge
of animal mystics,
brujas and sorcerers
or the nudging chants
of a Tlingit Kachina.
I am frightened by regions
with wills of their own,
but when my people
die in the snow
I wonder
did the depths billow up
to reach them?

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