Under the Edge of February

By Jayne Cortez

Under the edge of february
    in haw of a throat
    hidden by ravines of sweet oil
    by temples of switchblades
    beautiful in its sound of fertility
    beautiful in its turban of funeral crepe
    beautiful in its camouflage of grief
    in its solitude of bruises
    in its arson of alert

Who will enter its beautiful calligraphy of blood

Its beautiful mask of fish net
    mask of hubcaps mask of ice picks mask
    of watermelon rinds mask of umbilical cords
    changing into a mask of rubber bands
    Who will enter this beautiful beautiful mask of
    punctured bladders moving with a mask of chapsticks

Compound of Hearts  Compound of Hearts

Where is the lucky number for this shy love
    this top-heavy beauty bathed with charcoal water
    self-conscious against a mosaic of broken bottles
    broken locks  broken pipes  broken
    bloods of broken spirits broken through like
    broken promises

Landlords  Junkies  Thieves
    enthroning themselves in you
    they burn up couches they burn down houses
    and infuse themselves against memory
    every thought
    a pavement of old belts
    every performance
    a ceremonial pickup
    how many more orphans  how many more neglected shrines
    how many stolen feet  stolen fingers
    stolen watchbands of death
    in you how many times

Harlem

    hidden by ravines of sweet oil
    by temples of switchblades
    beautiful in your sound of fertility
    beautiful in your turban of funeral crepe
    beautiful in your camouflage of grief
    in your solitude of bruises
    in your arson of alert
    beautiful

Source: On the Imperial Highway (Hanging Loose Press, 2009)