

By Wendy Rose

making promises they can't keep.
For you, Grandmother, I said I would pull
each invading burr and thistle from your skin,
cut out the dizzy brittle eucalypt,
take from the ground the dark oily poison—
all to restore you happy and proud,
the whole of you transformed
and bursting into tomorrow.

 But where do I cut first?
Where should I begin to pull?
Should it be the Russian thistle
down the hill where backhoes
have bitten? Or African senecio
or tumbleweed bouncing
above the wind? Or the middle finger
of my right hand? Or my left eye
or the other one? Or a slice
from the small of my back, a slab of fat
from my thigh? I am broken
as much as any native ground,
my roots tap a thousand migrations.
My daughters were never born, I am
as much the invader as the native,
as much the last day of life as the first.
I presumed you to be as bitter as me,
to tremble and rage against alien weight.
Who should blossom? Who should receive pollen?
Who should be rooted, who pruned,
who watered, who picked?
Should I feed the white-faced cattle
who wait for the death train to come
or comb the wild seeds from their tails?
Who should return across the sea
or the Bering Strait or the world before this one
or the Mother Ground? Who should go screaming
to some other planet, burn up or melt
in a distant sun? Who should be healed
and who hurt? Who should dry
under summer's white sky, who should shrivel
at the first sign of drought? Who should be remembered?
Who should be the sterile chimera of earth and of another place,
alien with a native face,
native with an alien face?

Wendy Rose, "Woman Like Me" from *Itch Like Crazy*. Copyright © 2002 by Wendy Rose. Reprinted by permission of University of Arizona Press.

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