



Necessary Kindling: Poems

Anjail Rashida Ahmad

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The necessary kindling is what ignites, and in the title poem it begins this way: “when she awakens, / she remembers / the shape of her own breath, / pressing it / into the heart of her words.” So, like all first words, this enunciation is life-giving and life-affirming.

ahmad brings to the fore her curves and flesh and intuitive wisdom; she is not in pant-suited denial of what it is to be a woman in this world: “witnessing these two / do what women of my family have always done, / i begin to understand / what I’ve taken for granted / all the years before: / how the acts of women-loving themselves-can keep the spirit / renewed.” Her poems traverse ancestry and personal myth; expand into widening circles of jazz music, young mothers laying themselves bare to prove paternity in a sexist culture, the dreaded hair of those that survived the Middle Passage, and the premature birth of her firstborn son: “at the blood gate, / at the howling birth mouth, / i listened for you / day and night.”

Back to the kindling: ahmad is raw with living when she writes about apple picking. “i have fruit / without knowing the tree // from which it fell. with a vagabond / hunger, i am eaten to the core.” This realness and revelation is at the heart of ahmad’s stronger poems, and in general she avoids what others who write so personally seem to render, which is a lack of relevance when a private moment is made public without justification.

Elliptical, yet concrete in their imagery and narration, these poems satisfy the desire to peek through windows at the lyrical and rough ways that other women, and other families, go about their lives.

HOLLY WREN SPAULDING (November / December 2001)

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