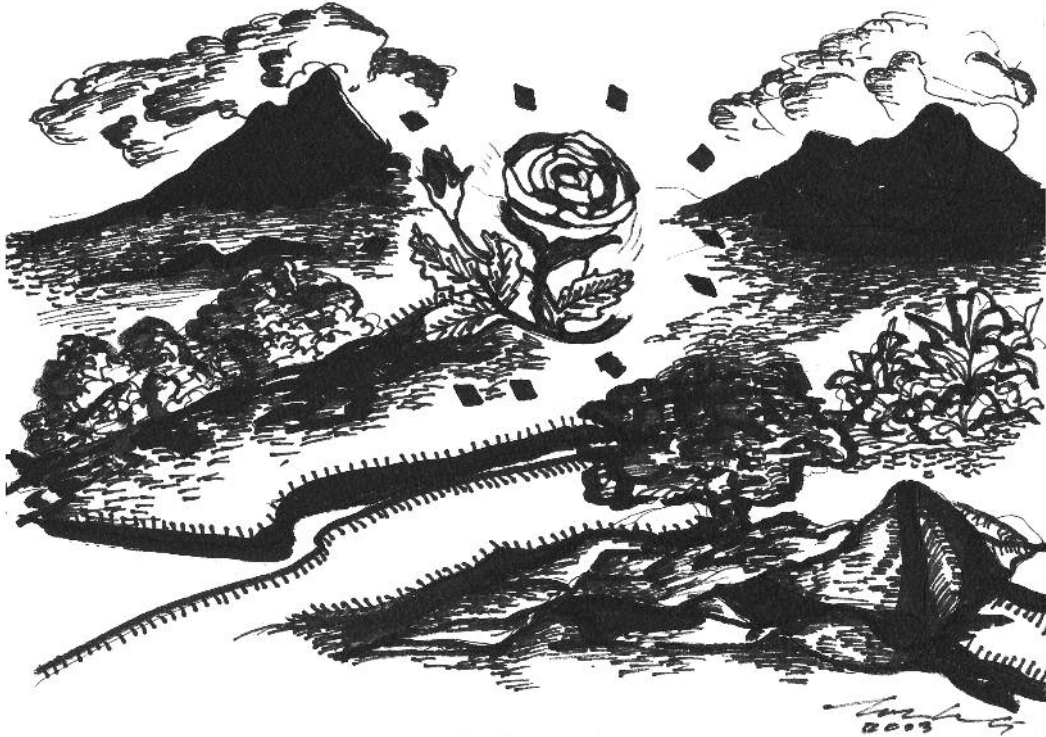


Selected Poems

By Rita Maria Magdaleno



My Mother's Hair

When I think of my mother at seventeen, I see her
sitting on the floor of the warm kitchen
on Brunnenlechgässchen. It is 1946
and the war is over, a bright spring afternoon.
The earth has stopped trembling.
My mother has gotten a perm, curls shining
like copper. "Pretty girl," my father is singing
and dancing around her. "Yes,
you are my pretty girl," smell of bread
rising, calendulas on the table.
Martha, my mother's best friend,
is riding away on her motorcycle.
The war is over.
My mother's hair
is shining.

Schutzstaffel, SS Uncle

Luis, I never knew you, seen more coldly
in this winter light. You had a decent life.

Your mother, now dead, called you
my damp rose. Your brother still searches
for you, never wanted to admit you were
the one who hid the tattoo, that stark symbol
fired into the pit of your arm.

You were cruel;
the song of light never entered your throat,
and the Aryan blood I carry is tinged blue,
the sky grieving a sea of shining skulls,
a cruel streak
silver as the oar of a boat drifting on a lake of bones.

Brunnenlechgässchen, the small source street
is where you begin to feel yourself opening, but the horror
grew daily and you became a fist punching the gray sky.

You were the one who hated dark ones.
Would you have hated
me too? I'm not hiding in the sacred plumes
of a white swan, blonde boy
you were the one plucking the heads of doves
there at the creek with your father.

If they knew the truth
of this dying century, the Hungarians
would hand you over.

Uncle, traitor, SS, gunner, killer,
exterminator of all that was,
how many times did you refuse to say, "*It ends now*"?

If the world holds your redemption,
white flower of truth
conceived in darkness, I cannot find it,
der Bayerische Marsch marsch marsch!
Black boots, goose-stepping

Einundzwanzig, zweiundzwanzig,
twenty-one, twenty-two
marching marching, *zwanzig, zwanzig,*
dreissig, vierzig
twenty thirty forty more
to kill. White flag of surrender,
I want to stake it into your heart.

Luis, I am waiting at the winter river, branch
of a linden tree shining in my Azteca
heart, mixed blood you would have
spilled without hesitation,
Schutzstaffel, SS uncle,
I am waiting for you.



Marlene Dietrich, Rita Hayworth & My Mother

—1946

PFC, smart in that khaki uniform, she fell in love with your wide smile & thick black hair, glint of a gold tooth like a star or a broken promise you still carry. How easy it seemed you fell in love, your baby sister saying, *She's too purty!* Marlene Dietrich pretty, her smoky voice & those wide Aryan eyes that promised never to lie, bore you a child she named Rita. Yes, after Rita Hayworth she said that balmy eve you left the movie theater at the Sheridan Kaserne arm in arm. *My pretty girl* you called her and summer was ending, chestnut trees lining the sidewalk of Königstrasse, King Street, the untranslatable language of love. Mexican American GI with your pretty girl, you were the one who wanted that Hollywood film to go on & on. You still recasting its beautiful ending.



Green Cards, Promises, & the Berlin Wall

One

Come together, they chanted, *the border is falling apart between us*. You said “it was beautiful in Berlin before the war.” *Beautiful*, you were, believing the fortune teller who arrived after the war. She saw green cards & promises, sunlight falling on the face of the New York Harbor. You wore a bronzed butterfly in your hair, the crystal necklace (gift from my GI father) hovering like a chunk of sunlight, radiant, above your breasts. It was a shining moment & you believed America was *the pure dream*— my face, a dark moon surfacing between your thighs.

....

Ten

Lines & creases etched the small mistakes on your face. “You were the one,” my father said. And you bore me —dark daughter, *mojada* still swimming the harbor. I have cleared the rubble of stones, Berlin hailed as *the new capital*. Reconciliation. *Come together*, the border people are singing, our mothers dreaming in glass caskets for another hundred years. We are riding ships on the Rhine & I am crossing blue mountains, water —a wetback escaping to an American education.



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