

con flama
Written by
Sharon Bridgforth
 Copyright (c) 2002

my earliest memory is of my grandmother's laughter when i was three and we lived in
 chicago/and i stole her beer and drank it down before my mother got across the room to
 take it away

georgia sweet georgia on my mind/was on the radio.
 my mother was very upset but i didn't care
 cause i liked the taste of beer
 and grandmother's laughter.

grandmother smelt like sweaty stockings and day old beer. every night
 i climbed into a sweet sleep encased in that smell/and grandmother's thick
 damp skin/big belly snores and covers.
 i loved no one more than my grandmother.
 who are our Ancestors grandmother?
 i used to ask her
 cause i was hoping i had more grandmothers somewhere.
 she'd say

kassa shaka mutu.

my mother told me grandmother
 was 15 when she picked the chicago streets over her own child
 who she sent back south to the home house/so
 i knew grandmother loved no one more than me cause we were in chicago
 and she was there
 to tuck me in at night.
 i loved my grandmother
 even though she made my mother cry.

who are our Ancestors grandmother?
 i'd ask on rainy days or nights i wasn't sleepy

kuta mako mo

she'd say
 and i'd make believe for hours that they were visiting us.

we got evicted cause grandmother drank up three months rent money and my mother
 didn't know/and that's how we ended up in los angeles cause right when we got on the
 street grandmother's sister came by on her way to los angeles and me and my mother got
 in the car/went with her. grandmother stayed on the street waving

bye babies
i love you.

my mother is still angry about that but i didn't care
cause i knew grandmother would join us when the next great-aunty car came by.

four years later my mother sent me south to stay at the home house
until she finished night school i didn't care
cause grandmother was back at the home house too and as soon as i saw her
i loved her more again. more than ever.
who are our Ancestors grandmother?
i asked
happy to hear her voice

kaba zula we
she said

grandmother
you said our Ancestors were
kassa shaka mutu and kuta mako mo you never said there was a kaba zula we
this can't be right grandmother
who are our Ancestors!

she said
shit gal
i don't know.

that was a very unsettling moment.
why
didn't she know i wondered.
why don't i know
i wonder
i wonder
why/i am crying/i am crying now/now i cry...