

the Q's supplement

A strong woman is a woman who is straining.
A strong woman is a woman standing
on tiptoe and lifting a cedar log
while trying to sing.

A strong woman is a woman at work
cleaning out the cesspool of the ages
and while she shovels, she talks about
how she doesn't mind crying, it opens
the ducts of the eyes, and
she goes on shovelling with tears
in her nose.

A strong woman is a woman in whose head
a voice is repeating, I told you so,
nobody will ever love you back,
why aren't you . . .

A strong woman is a woman determined
to do something others are determined
not to be done. She is pushing up on
the bottom of a lead lid. She is trying to
raise a moose on her shoulders.
She is trying to butt her way through a steel
wall. Her head hurts. People waiting for the hole
to be made say, hurry, you're so strong.

A strong woman is a woman bleeding inside.
A strong woman is a woman making herself strong
every morning while her teeth loosen and her back
throbs. Every baby, a tooth, midwives used to say,
and now every battle a scar. A strong woman is a mass of scar
tissue that aches when it rains and wounds that bleed
when you bump them and memories that get up in the night
and pace in boots to and fro.

A strong woman is a woman who craves love like oxygen or
she turns blue choking. A strong woman is a woman who
loves strongly and weeps strongly and is strongly afraid
and has strong needs. A strong woman is strong in her words
in action, in connection, in feeling;
she is not strong as a stone but as a wolf suckling her young.
Strength is not in her, but she is strength as the wind fills
a sail.

What comforts her is others loving her equally for the strength
and for the weakness from which it comes, lightning from a cloud.
Lightning stuns. In rain, the clouds disperse,
Only water remains, flowing through us. Strong is what we make
each other. Until we are all strong together, men and women,
a strong woman is a woman strongly afraid.

Bernelda Wheeler, reprinted from *Sweetgrass*,
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I am unclean,
daughter of an unwashed,
fisherwoman
loud, lean and raw.
I have no manners
no finesse
Iron will
and loyalty
are all that I possess.
I am not a docile forest creature
a quaint curio
I am a burning flame
not yet uhuru
not yet woman
but very much alive.

lee maracle
from *I am Woman*

I Love You Crazy Mary (a poem for mary at the ardmere tearoom)

I feel a poem comin on
says the woman with the black neck —
a bag full of sacred objects
falls between her breasts.
Keeps me safe and keeps me calm

I feel a poem comin on
says the saggy breasted woman
with her black neck and bag of stones
she moans and crunes and cries

I feel a poem comin on
she squeals in delight
all through the night
with it all hanging out
she shouts at the moon Aroo—

I feel a poem comin on
crazy Mary sing with me
write love sonnets in glee
and talk gibberish and make the world squirm
you with your bows and bags
and i with my bags and breasts.

I feel a poem comin on
and coming on we kareem and swoon and clasp
our breasts and laugh at the world
and the squirmy people on the bus
"Crazy Mary I love you!"
cries the black necked saggy breasted woman
and a poem came ah .

Paula Arsenault