

MARGO SWISS

Her Body

for my mother

Her body is outstretched on disinfected
sheets,
its nakedness exposed by the gloved compas-
sion of a nurse.

Uncovering wounds;
frozen years ago
her right shoulder protrudes,
its humerus cap absorbed,
bleeding beneath skin.

One breast flattened by time,
the other excised, its scar faint,
give no account of shame,
the loss of "perfect breasts,"
preserved with care after childbirth.

Her slender waist and unflawed belly
betray no signs of struggle,
of love either feared or forced,
of threats sustained,
the defeated parting of thighs
that proceed now in silence
from two surgically-pinned hips.

And what of this luminous hue
of eighty-six-year-old skin
stretched lineless over all
as blood empties its way softly,
descending down to feet
twisted and winged,
(better to fly than walk with)
blackening?

The sight of all this—
tissue memory of tears—
is sealed forever.

Her profile remains
dauntless
with aquiline intent
eyes wide
peer upward
to where
she lingers a time
to behold

her self
transfigured ageless
in full morning light,

no longer needing candles or moon
to guide her.

Margo Swiss is the author of Crossword: A Woman's Narrative and a contributor to Susan McCuslin, ed. Poetry and spiritual Practice: Selections from Contemporary Canadian Poets.