

SAVING MY SKIN FROM BURNING

There was a hole in the ground once; there was a manhole
I used to get inside. I lowered a rope
and kicked my way down. The walls were two feet thick
and there was at most a foot of leaves where somehow
the wind had crept in, but there was no water. I felt for
the pipe, there was a little ledge—with matches.
I tried to get out. The truth was I fell. My mind
was on vipers, I called my enemies vipers, it was
an old honorific word but now I shook,
they were not just snakes—they were adders—their bodies
were flat, their fangs were huge, my enemies
strike like they do—their heads are triangles,
their eyes are in their skulls. I screamed for rope,
I needed rags, I had to save my skin
from burning—my chest and upper arms.

The hole

is our greatest fear; I grab the air behind me
and stiffen my legs. The greatest joy is rising,
the greatest joy is resting your arms on the ground
and getting ready to swing your body up
and seeing the clouds again and feeling the wind
on your white legs, and rubbing your eyes. I ran
to touch a tree, I stroked the bark, there was
one stone, it was half-pitted, the sun had turned it
into a pillow; I lay on my back recovering.

R FOR ROSEMARY

I heard a fluttering—just inside the door
of my *casita*; it was inside a bush,
a kind of pine, a kind of blue rosemary,
and since I saw two doves wandering under
my window yesterday and over my stones
I thought there had to be a mourning dove—