

## Eight Poems · *Gabriela Mistral*

### from *Poems of the Mothers*

#### WHAT WILL HE BE LIKE?

What will he be like? I've studied the petals of a rose for hours, I touched them with delight: I would want that softness for his cheeks. And I've played in a tangle of blackberries because I would want his hair like that, dark and curly. But it won't matter if it's brown, that rich color of the fuller's red clay that the potters love, and if his straight hair has the simplicity of my life.

I study the craggy mountains when they fill with mist, and I form the silhouette of a girl, a sweet child, with the mist: so she could be that also.

But more than anything, I want him to have the sweetness of his gaze, and to have the tremor of his voice when he speaks with me, because in the one who comes I want to love the one who kissed me.

#### SWEETNESS

Because of the sleeping child I carry, my step has become secretive. And my whole heart is religious since it began carrying mystery.

My voice is soft, like a mute love song, and all because I'm afraid of awakening him.

Now my eyes search faces for the sorrow deep inside, so that the others may look and understand the reason for my pale cheeks.

With fear born of tenderness, I search through the grasses where the quail make their nests. And I go through the field silently, cautiously: I believe trees and all things have sleeping children whom they hover over, keeping watch.

## MY SISTER

Today I've watched a woman digging a furrow. Her hips are filled out like mine, because of love, and she was bending over the ground as she worked.

I've caressed her waist; I've carried her with me. She'll drink rich milk from my own glass and rejoice in the shadow of my corridors which are laden with the weight of love. And if my breast isn't generous, my child's lips will come to the richness of hers.

## QUIET

I can't go along the roads anymore; I'm embarrassed by my wide waist and the deep circles under my eyes. But bring me here, put the clay pots filled with flowers here beside me, and play the zither long and slowly: I want to flood myself with beauty for him.

I recite eternal stanzas over the one who sleeps. Hour after hour I gather the acrid sun on the porch. I want to distill honey, like fruit does, into my depths. I welcome the wind from the pine grove in my face.

Let the light and the winds redden and wash my blood. In order to cleanse it, now I don't hate, I don't gossip, I only love!

For I'm weaving in this silence, in this quiet, a body, a miraculous body, with veins and face, and gaze, and purest heart.

## EARTH'S IMAGE

I hadn't seen the true image of the Earth before. The Earth has the shape of a woman with a child in her arms (with her young in her wide arms).

I'm beginning to recognize the maternal feeling of things. The mountain that watches me is also mother, and in the afternoon the fog plays like a child on her shoulders and knees.

Now I remember a gorge in the valley. A stream went singing through its deep bed, completely hidden by the craggy ground covered with brambles. Now I'm like the gorge; I feel this small arroyo sing in my depths and I have given him my flesh for a cover of brambles until he comes up to the light.

### DAWN

All night I've suffered, all night my flesh has shuddered to deliver its gift. There's the death sweat on my temples; but this isn't death, it's life!

And now I call You Infinite Sweetness, oh Lord, so that You might free him easily.

Be born now, and let my cry of pain rise at dawn, woven with the singing of the birds!

### *from Poems of the Saddest Mother*

### CAST OUT

My father said he would throw me out; he shouted at my mother that he would cast me out this very night.

The night is warm; by the clear light of the stars I could walk to the next village; but what if he's born during these hours? Maybe my sobs have called him; maybe he'd want to come out to see my face. And he'd shiver in the raw wind, even though I'd cover him.

### WHY DID YOU COME?

Why did you come? No one will love you even though you're beautiful, my child. Even though you smile happily, like the other children, like the youngest of my little brothers, no one will kiss you but me, my child. And even though your small hand might search all over for toys, you won't have anything to play with except my breast and the thread of my tears, my child.