

Celia

Celia, born in Brazil, has long been an enchanting songwriter and entertainer in the Bay Area, an activist advocate for the rights of the people of her native and adopted countries and of the rights of the women of the world, and my fascinating friend. This story-poem is told in her voice.

I feel very connected with you
as I am writing this
but also reading this
for the first time,
just like you.

And you:
Will you be cared for
as I was, by Iaia,
as a little girl in Rio,
where my crazy flower of a Momma
left my Father, the man in the television,
left him helpless
to put order in our hearts?

Are you holding my hand?,
How do you feel
when you read how much
I care about your caring
About me?

Iaia, dear Iaia,
she was from Bahia,
the warm womb of Brazil,
she'd come with *Candomblé*,
the river on which the African saints
had sailed westward in chains,
on slave ships in dark days.

Iaia cooked us *cozido* and *pirão*
and delighted with us
in our girlish dancing.

Luiz Gonzaga Malheiros,
our esteemed Papa,
could never be a Mama,

so he sat himself
at a worn wooden desk
to prove the inexistence
of God.

Maria de Gloria,
in her separate sticky room
in Copacabana,
missing the mothering of me,
did auditions for Death.

Thanks be, neither Luiz nor Maria succeeded!
And in between them,
I began to hear the music:
the breath of the waves,
the clamoring *coro* of the sidewalks,
and my way started
to compose itself.

I bloomed,
and learned to be plucked,
and tested my browned and blonded body
by quickening its head
with smoke and colors.

Sometimes I saw
what Mama saw
and was glad and sad
to see it.

Papa send me away
to the Disneyland North,
where I learned to order
greasy food
with hard consonants.

But I remembered to sing,
and I found America yearning
towards my tangy diphthongs,
seeking my salt-watered
musical memories,
needing curing
from my dear dead Iaia.

Are you listening now,
 as I sing *choro* and *bossa*?
Have you married me
 and made a mother of me?
And now,
 are we world enough?

--- by Jeff Kaliss,
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