



Photo by Deborah Munro



LYNN STRONGIN

SONG OF THE SOUTH

SEVENTIETH SUMMER (South Voice)

I.

Hot Florida night winds are aerial bombardments storming the wall. Fateful innocence.
Would you love me if it were cancer?
An electrical storm rocking the body, chemical cell warfare?
The street cryer is the rag & bone man. I recall the south while slippers
Thud in the dryer downhall.
The broken man is coming
Tempers not long, we scrap around in the fridge for leftover pasta & Tandouri.
I am the womanchild who swallowed the moon
This is the slippery summer, the one that could get away.

North Face, South Voice here on the other line, all nerves
All heart
Listening. The South is a house like fiction with many windows, few doors.
The south is swimming thru water to water.
The lime house washed with sun blinding like Avignon,
My memories of paralysis
Lasting
Dotting Holy dragons eyes Chinese custom before Dragon boat races

to wake them from a deep sleep.
Sleepers, awaken!

It was my 9th winter:
Got my teeth sparkled at Showboat Dental Center outside Sarasota
Baby teeth brushed with a circular electric machine, blow-dried. My hair permed.
I saw pearl underwear
Flash thru vision: ivory lace tatty as old ecru cigarette burns.
Ink, the new gold.
Didn't know about makeover
Owned no puff for my powder. "Girls, legs are best friends: they stay together"
But I'm in the Baptist pew:
"I've got a satin gown" LeAnn leant in close whispering thru gap in front teeth
After she'd slipped into the Southern Fried Baptist Church (I was the stolen child)
"We're fundamentalist. That means we consider our fundament," she giggled.

School choir warming up. Older sister, oddball Sabine a gangly girl brace on teeth
Day before First Communion.
Her mother had sewn on her ancient Singer an old lacy sheet into a dress.
She could smell cod cake frying a mile down the road
Bore a heavy load
Fancied cod cheeks fried in the pan. *Scrunchions* our Newfoundland bartending friend
taught us.

Borderline normal, Sabine couldn't know I faced a dilemma of my own:
I held my head high looking down at sheer dress so thin like silk it barely covered
My private triangle.
A heat wave bent the mind corrugating rooves shimmering.
I began clapping quietly at the hymn "Go tell it on the mountain."
It was music to get you out of the pew dancing. Riley was LeAnn & Sabine's kid brother
the only boy.
Riley had a sense of premature darkness gathering like a storm
& Said "This kitchen's black as the inside of a toaster."
Next the canary, Enrico Caruso, died.
Sweet Pea, is it true I am seventy?
Use all your Godwit; rain the yard a jump rope
The sweet rain falleth down
Bianca mosca, I am riding the white monkey. Insomnia has planted me a white garden
Flowers radium by the moon.
Like Riley who announced one evening stirring us kids lemonade
"I'm partially a nun."

Locking scissor brakes on wheelchair (polio brittle, pressed flowers in last century's
Bible)
One rainy night Riley, LeAnn's & Sabine's Pa *caught fire* in his big rig driving a tunnel.
His burns made him drink, "this is my little angel now," he lifted bathtub gin.
I stashed the word away to look up when I got home. Still cross-eyed, wearing glasses.
Bowl-cut dirty blonde bangs—forecast of Scout Finch, *No mockingbird killed, No member
of
the Wedding:*
Glass hail beads began beating against our sun porch
Lu's pa now went whoring around
It sure is hot I told mother. Will the divorce be concluded soon so we can head north?
Bide your time, she said.

“My eyes are shutting, my head nodding, I can’t mind this telephone.”

“You’re a Strongin, you can mind that telephone

If your eyelashes darken your eyeball & your cheek

Take more caffeine.”

We sipped caffeine in a straw minding the telephone while Mother hung wash on the line.

The South sure could use some cheering,

“Your father’s married to his work & his sister, not to me.

Your father’s love is too clinical for me,” she ground out a cigarette.

Our love was never clinical, Sweet Pea.

Florika may have been no longer suicidal

Walking thru New York in bare feet, on glass in pelting rain

& Ben’s cancer had not metastasized to the liver

Little hope for Yelta’s baby: projectile vomiting.

Probably brain damage. But

The sweet rain still down could rain.

Sweet cheeks, you may have been violated: I was paralyzed

Mother’s own children were going without things

“That baby has a deviated septum,” she’d glanced with anger & pity toward the baby.

“She’s always putting beads up her nose.

And she doesn’t take kindly to enemas.”

Father nodded, lit up a Pell Mell.

North Face, that was him with the Puritan austerity of snowfields, blue light, and

Russian background

Sorrow equal to the sparrow.

II.

Mother’s firepower was drained.

I kept everyone’s secrets

Only when I caught polio three years later did Mother soften slightly

Then stiffening. Guardian of language

Training kids over twelve be soldiers.

I held myself alert, Sweet Pea, the afternoon we slipped into the pews.

This one was slippery but wouldn’t get away.

I touched the church seat mirror-shiny yet scarred.

Smoothed my dress as we’d been taught

Then glimpsed down thru sheer pinafore to see naked crotch.

Tempting the devil?

Didn’t believe in one with a red tail & sharp fangs.

Nobody’s doll, no bed of roses to be taken to a hospital

Lu had made a beeline for dress-up

Hair in ringlets consulted the mirror: “Mirrors don’t lie.”

Lied it was for a school play

I got a start over forgotten undies

But it was quiet in my head no voices.

“A penny” Mother lit up from Daphne Du Maurier, blew smoke rings, squinted at me

“Nothing.” I felt I was at a strip mall, aged 9, & she was undoing me.

I’d have been better without that peanut butter ice cream.

You’re quiet as an egg

“The divorce was consummated.

I excused myself, went to my dictionary

Consummation started a whole new trail of question marks puffing like smoke from a train

Or like the balloons above cartoons.
Want coffee
Yep. Say Yes, you're not a dog."
She said, "We are at our wit's end."
"Where?"
"We are here."

Would autumn ever come? She handed me her cigarette
I was cat-purring.
I knew I was but a vessel. Yet a weasel.
I was Shakespeare's reincarnation
Once I was Mozart's.
I kept to myself these mysticisms
As a psychotic child keeps her voices locked in her head, pigeons making a feathery
sound nesting in the walls of prison.

III.

Poverty, distortion, pariahhood of the South
North Face
Made us all characters out of Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*
Albeit I am dying, I am Albion the moon
The boy dying of lung cancer in Alabama would say
Waving long ethereal arms casting an otherworldly gave over us like the moon.

Albion resisted radiation, chemo.
His dad culled old "Open" signs from rural gas stations
Grocery stores
Neon tubing once red against the southern night now unplugged, colorless
Then plugged in above the bed of his son.

Speech got your nerve-endings.
Look at you swanning away, said Luella
I was wearing City Girl.
Mama wouldn't weep salt tears over a dead swan.
Golden autumn will come, Sweet Pea, North Face
October at it's finest
Luella sent me Albion's nigh light, an old lantern boat light trimmed with glass.

Boats.
Polio already in my spinal cord
The tables veered
Land was a forecast of the tilt-table on which I'd be stood an hour a day after polio:
The tiny light dotting New Rochelle harbor
Became residence of ward nights
Cot lights
Thorns but now, North Face, I was crossover harbor to home.

"Sweet heart, could I pass?"
"Of course," she laughs. "You are Puck. You re everybody."
Polio has kept me in a child's body with a woman's passion?
Rooms' dark as inside of a toaster.
Sweet Pea says I like a cave. My eye, a cave. A cove. Love.

As a crow wears black you'll wear white at your wedding' but Sabena was a bit of a shrew

And I would have no wedding.

Come he chorus wearing rice-white, tofu pale gowns:

Sweet Pea glued the tea caddy & developed her schedule of the bus schedule

Mother's gone thru the hoop of death

No longer heating wax-off on the kitchen stove for her face.

Make wide the doorway

That they might enter in:

Salvation Saviour.

An hour rain.

Scrunchions

Smaller when soaking wet weighing 50 pounds

I caught polio

Bones poking thru.

It hurts to see too much.

Writing it being raped by an angel:

You're laid flat, concave, receive visions.

The turn of a mirror, anything can trigger memories of childhood abuses

But night slides them off the mirror

A fall from the wheelchair in mid night?

I phoned Sweet Pea from the next room." North Face this is South voice calling." Tall

women are elegant. This is our cove. Small women are for love.

Envoi

LINES BEGINNING WITH A FIRE FIGHTER

To rise, be carried on the shoulders of this loss

Gone like a golden boy on parent's shoulders

Above pearl underwear & mechano sets, beyond flossy dolls

Kleenex boxes with landscapes inhalators for congestions

& poor Poll

to rise & be married

Lofted thru the arch was not the outcome

not even an option'

Fear not little flock

For the diseased are measured by being brought to the top of the city

Gas-burners

Barnstormers

Faith-takers

Begone.

Carrying the nude child paralyzed who did a series of kicks at the mobility aid

Waking

Dawn

Perfect body

Placed a foot on an armrest and with the weight of the arms push the rest up on the air:

Ball of foot kicks back entire frame of wheelchair.

Get a bold, an intrepid photographer, one who doesn't straddle

& tone down
to take
in fine grain a series
of gymnastic rebellions
rolling like balls
Benjamin Franklin saw a fire & invented the fire department.

We got scrap it money for the old car & scrapped it.
Begone, Begonia of beggaring light, the poor, the South:
Come Magnolia, the opulent, and the history-scarred truth

Printable Version

[<-- previous](#) [next -->](#)

Magnolia Florida Journal

Last Updated October 15, 2009