

My Mother Pieced Quilts

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they were just meant as covers
in winters
as weapons
against pounding january winds

but it was just that every morning I awoke to these
october ripened canvases
passed my hand across their cloth faces
and began to wonder how you pieced
all these together
these strips of gentle communion cotton and flannel
nightgowns
wedding organdies
dime store velvets

how you shaped patterns square and oblong and round
positioned
balanced
then cemented them
with your thread
a steel needle
a thimble

how the thread darted in and out
galloping along the frayed edges, tucking them in
as you did us at night
oh how you stretched and turned and re-arranged
your michigan spring faded curtain pieces
my father's santa fe work shirt
the summer denims, the tweed of fall

in the evening you sat at your canvas
---our cracked linoleum floor -the drawing board
me lounging on your arm
and you staking out the plan;
whether to put the lilac purple of eastel- against the red
plaid of winter-going-
into-spring
whether to mix a yellow with blue and white and paint the
corpus christi noon when my father held your hand
whether to shape a five-point star from the
somber black silk you wore to grandmother's funeral].

You were the river current
carrying the roaring notes
forming them into pictures of a little boy reclining
a swallow flying
You were the caravan master at the reins
driving your thread needle artillery across the mosaic
cloth bridges
delivering yourself in separate testimonies

oh mother you plunged me sobbing and, laughing
into our past
into the river crossing at five
into the spinach fields
into the plainview cotton rows
into tuberculosis wards
into braids and muslin dresses
sewn hard and taut to withstand the thrashings of
twenty-five years

stretched out they lay
armed/ready/shouting/celebrating

knotted with love

the quilts sing on