

SANNII CRESPINA-FLORES

Sannii Crespina-Flores is a teaching artist, advocate and activist for youth and women. She is the founder of the Un-Inhibited Muse Film Festival, the global youth initiative Do Remember Me and the art collaborative Yram Collective. She is the author of the audio book 'Conversations with my Conscience' that debuted in South Africa and London and the forthcoming e-book "Machetes are forged in Soft Rivers". She has screened work at the 60th Cannes and was awarded the grand prize for the short story challenge at the 15th Sundance Film Festivals. Her work has been on exhibit in Budapest, Colombia, South Africa, London, Italy, the United Nations (NY) as well local galleries. She has received grants to create works for independent television and cultural organizations. She is the board chair of the Stockton Rush Bartol Foundation and a member of the Writers Guild of America (East) Indie Caucus. She has also contributed to academic publications and created learning guides for TED Ed, National Geographic and the Hip Hop Education Center.

An Acceptable Sacrifice

We arrived with our gods, walked them into the soil and braided totems into our hair. Distance and time made memory a myth. The wind sang a lullaby that brought to mind lavender and lemons but the words were a mystery. She could feel the words pressing against her lips begging her to remember. She could not, not now. The only tide rising now, right now had been 'hushed' by the women preparing the way with wax, water, rum and fire.

The women sang too, some forked tongue melody of moon goddesses and warriors that were birthed by the ocean. New land words mixed with what was left of homeland words. It was no longer comforting.

Her small frame erupted in violent waves. She just wanted to rest, be soft like the doll she made for her sister from a long ago discarded dress. This last wave pulled her under the memory of

water. She was ready to break the surface of the water. She needed to breathe. Again. She held a whole ocean between her teeth and it was hungry to be free. She wanted to scream.

Her screams beat against her teeth in a futile effort to escape so she sounded like she was instead struggling to keep a secret. A low dull moan was what was given permission to escape. She heard 'push'.

And her trembling 12 year old legs gave way to a life.

The women moved as one toward the new child whispering prayers to a God they were sure had not forgotten them in this new land. Sure they had planted the seeds when they arrived and they were faithful.

*"Ala, Ala, we are here in a new land
your daughters, faithful and present
born in the divine light of the moon
Lend you voice to this child"*

As they created a small circle around mother and child to bear witness to the birth, a small moon faced life lay silent on a blanket of soft dried grass. It was a girl. She opened her almond shaped eyes and she and she

and she before her lived in the marrow of her bones. The weight of all that filled her tiny eyes with saltwater. The ocean that was not able to escape her mother's lips. Baby girl felt her mother's breath on her belly and noticed the smell, warmth and heaviness of it. This was the first feeling of separation. It was different than the vibration and scent of her recently abandoned home. The inhale, exhale of her mother moved her, lulled her, created a hymn. The ripple of her words tickling her ribs. These words would become her baptism and she would be reminded of them every time she inhaled, exhaled. A tickle becomes a tattoo. A prayer becomes a promise.

It was those conversations between God and her mother heard and felt while waiting to arrive. Soft whispers from her mother. A mother's plea for this new life and her name. A name is the first offering, the first sacrifice. The weight of it, the expectation to become someone not of your own choosing. Mother named her Sochi- only God. Only God could have given her this task,

this heavy journey. She was tasked with unraveling the voices in her bones from the she and the she before her. All the blood of her ancestors bubbling with memory and she had not yet created one memory of her own. She enjoyed their company but not their wanting to be free through her. A sacrifice no child should bear but it was hers like her mother and all the first born girl children before her.

Sochi was created because her mother, Awah, stopped remembering, stopped speaking aloud, stopped singing the signs and ways of the people. Awah, her name means "let us rest", wanted to rest, be still, be a child. She no longer wanted to be a bridge between this world and the world of the ancestors. Awah was becoming a ghost after living with spirits for so long. It was intoxicating until it felt like drowning. The drowning in voices that were not her own. She began to forget the sound of her own voice. She decided to give birth to her freedom. A new sacrifice, a new offering that would allow her to live. God would understand. She heard her prayers. No one had asked God before her.

Sochi's tongue was tied by infancy so instead she clenched her tiny fists opening and closing them slowly and purposefully conjuring the energy for the announcement of her arrival. A hush fell over the woman as they waited for the first sound the child would make. She felt their anticipation, their need and want.

Sochi made them wait.

