



## *Reds: II*

I still dream that I'm bleeding.

Big thick chunks of blood.

Ancient Aztec blood.

Sacrificial blood.

My blood.

I still dream that I have to run out of a roomful of people who think me strange, rude.

I dream that the blood is uncontrollable, unstanchable, red as stewed plums.

I run around like mad, trying to find something big enough to plug myself up.

How many missed-periods before these dreams stop?

Before I've paid my karmic debt to the godheads

who wanted to make me even more of a woman than I could bear.

The dreams unfold in fast-forward, in panic mode.

I am finally bleeding unto death.

And that's not the way I want out. I would prefer to go out meditating,

but who can focus on the breath, while liquid, like lava, erupts from the body?

I dream autopsies.

Doctors' whites stained with the last drops of my own red river.

They say: She just bled out. A bloodbath. A bloodletting gone wrong.

She bled until she turned white. She's as dry as papyrus.

And then, where go the stories?

The ones I carried with me under my skin, in veins that appeared blue.

The stories given to me, stolen from me or made up in the bathtub.

I've wanted to hang onto my blood, my stories.

I've wanted to stop being so afraid of the inner workings of my body.

What I couldn't see but only feel.

What I could feel but couldn't change.

This morning I dreamt I was bleeding.

And I've dragged the dream out of bed with me.

This dream—these dreams—stain my waking moments, like all the linens I've ruined.

Yes, I bled into my sexy underwear, my period underwear,

onto skirts, dress pants, jeans with holes in the knees,

towels, hardwood floors, tile, rugs,

on the bus, the train, in restaurant restrooms, in people's homes,

onto the sheets my grandmother slept in before she died...  
When I bled onto my shoes, I finally gave up.  
I sat down in a crimson puddle of myself and wept.

It always takes me a while to shake the red dream.  
Because it is half-real.  
Because I suspect there is some place in 'time' where I am still bleeding.  
Perhaps, where I am not heartbroken.

In order to hasten the dream disappearance, I count—  
Number of years spent bleeding, days spent bleeding, number of days since the last blood,  
Unsuccessful bloodlettings:  
                    one ruined the cave of my bellybutton,  
                    two was aborted because I began hemorrhaging;  
The triumphant one:  
                    took hours longer than expected, but finally freed me from my uterus.

Then there is the math of money spent on gauze, syringes and anesthesia;  
There is ensuing therapy and also money saved:  
from not buying liners, pads, tampons, ibuprofen, wine, muscle relaxers and sleeping pills.  
I count numerous scars easily found in the dark that map out part of my blood journey.  
And I always come back to the trinity of lines  
where blood flowed from intentional cuts on my body, like mini vaginas.

Bloodletters once left a piece of tumor in my mother's knee when attempting to remove it.  
It grew back big as a kneecap.  
If there is a piece of womb left in my cavity, it will grow.  
And if it grows, it will bleed.  
And if the reds return, I will finally go mad and they will lock me up like Frances, Viv, Camille...  
And I will get no work done.

This morning I dreamt I was wearing white pants.  
I had white pants in the 80s, when I shared them with a girl I had a crush on.  
In the dream we were decades beyond the 80s and she had lent me the pants.  
When I peeled them off to return them to her,  
I caught her horrified look as she caught sight of dried blood, thick as paint, all over my thighs.  
I knew I'd ruined my connection with her, a girl who might have understood,  
if only I could've explained that it wasn't contagious  
and that, if I was bleeding again, perhaps my bowels were spilling out of me  
and with them would come liver lungs vocals veins fascia fat marrow muscle...  
until I had completely turned myself inside out.

It had to be the bowels, because it couldn't possibly be the reds that plagued me for years,  
before I could afford to buy flowers and art.  
Before I knew that heartbreak was an unavoidable part of life and life could be lived in spite of it.

The last time I actually wore white was at a women's retreat in the middle of a swamp.  
The leaders ended every sentence with *ashay!* and insisted we wear white on the last night.

Without explanation, they simply shuttled us out under the moon that, along with an orange fire, lit a small clearing. Women stood around the fire wearing sheets, shorts and saris the color that some Buddhists wear to funerals.

As in the dream, I wore borrowed whites and told no one what it meant to me.  
Or of the irrational fear that if dream-life bled into waking-life it could leave us all drenched in my old debts. Stained indelibly, like Catholics.  
I didn't stay dressed in white for long.

And I don't long to wear white any more than I want to completely forget years of fascination at seeing my heart-fluid outside myself, crying, 'Out, damned spots! Out...'  
in much the same way as when the big-love break-up brought me to my knees  
and I cried: 'Out, damned heart... Out.'

*That* would have been a perfect time to bleed,  
to discharge the old blood that had coursed through my heart  
when it was connected with hers.

I almost expected to spontaneously burst into red,  
not like a stigmatic, more so a weeping Bolivian statue.  
I planned to wipe the blood from my eyes, war-paint myself and, like Catholics wear ashes,  
go out into the world reminding others that from blood we come and to blood we shall return.

But when my body didn't comply, when I couldn't see an outward manifestation of agony,  
I carved our symbol into my arm and temporarily felt eased—  
because red was there to express my pain.

When these cuts healed and left no traceable scars, I cut open my flesh once more.  
By the third bloodletting, when the wounds again healed into invisibility,  
I knew my body didn't need a pictogram to prove it persisted.

And though I thought I had cheated the reds, they are just as persistent  
in a dream world where I chase tampons all night long.  
When I find some, they prove to be too big to fit inside me.  
So I either harm myself trying to shove them in or I bleed out, slowly and colorfully.

Neither scenario is glamorous, even though red.  
Vibrant feminine sections in stores make the reds seem glamorous, even though they're not.  
I have stopped caring about glamour.  
I have not stopped being a woman and that is to say,  
I have not stopped being exhausted.  
Only extinguished, drop by drop.