

BELLADONNA* CHAPLET SERIES



BELLADONNA* COLLABORATIVE

925 Bergen Street, Suite 405, Brooklyn, NY 11238

THE ENDURANCE
*Motherhood is a young woman's
game*

by

Sina Queyras

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Motherhood is a young woman's game

THE ENDURANCE © Sina Queyras

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Sina Queyras

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1. ROLL CALL

You who were not born in a boat. You who can not tread water. You who do not qualify for safe passage. You who are without a compass. You who cannot take the air between your hands and feel the ions of improbability. You who have not stepped out of the satin shadows. You who remain weighed down. You who are unable to slip by. You who can stand the sudden drop in temperature. The rising air pressure. You who have opened, and then closed the door. You who remain sceptical. You have peered into the 21st century.

Or, as the women say, are you are kind?

Do you have the stuff? Are you willing to sign up for a lack of glory? A lack of sex? A lack of wages? A lack of respect? A lack of public? A lack of resources? Are you willing to lose your name? Your body? Are you okay with probable failure? A certain unremarkable life? Are you willing to fail?

You who come to us with your brightness, with your lavender eyes, with your fresh wombs.

You who arrive penniless with no direction.

You who slide out of your parents' apartment while they are distracted by the pipe.

You who walk out of your town with a grocery bag and a steak knife for protection.

You who turn away from the empty but well-meaning, from the small and well-meaning, from the militant and well-meaning.

You who set out on the highway, walking, who take a ride from a stranger and vanish.

All of you who slip through.

All of you who bang down the doors.

*

Are you our kind? We are so wary of the takers. We don't want your market place values on board. We are searching for a safe corner. We are looking for safe passage. We are searching for a new world. We have a dream of glory, it is a dream of a new world outside of capital. It is a world uninhabitable by bureaucrats. It is a world marked by rituals of joy.

You can be our kind. You can. You can leave your buffer zone. You can puncture your cushion. You whose children expect other children to be their audience, you can stop teaching them to assume that others will be the legs that hold up the excess of their identities, their backs the stonework of your gardens, their bones the furniture they lounge on, their blood the sweet pink they drink.

No, I am not impressed by your Chanel glasses, by your Crate & Barrel rooms. I no longer wonder how you sleep at night. Certainly we will not share a bunk.

You who cocoon yourself in culture like a scarf, the lives attached like baubles reflecting you so brightly as you drape them around your neck, we will not share a bunk.

I don't wonder that you will not sign up for the journey, you will pay me to take your journey, but I will not take your journey, this is a journey for the self in others and the others in the self, we have no call for a you that glints against the pain of others like pink lacquer.

You can open the gate, but you can't make a mind leave.

You can open a mind, but you can't stop it from shutting the gate.

8. IF IT WALKS LIKE AN IGUANADOON

Scantly clad women dive off of ice floes
A starlet floats in the glacial run off of parc la Fontaine
Polar Bears paw through suburbs looking for soft drinks
Starlings lining up to watch winter on the Jumbotron
The 20th Century was the most productive time of mourning
Sorrow hardened into colourful plastic, years
Like a standing wave across the earth.

2. ON BOARD

I am imagining a we on board. It is a dream of a we afloat. I am dreaming a we afloat. I am in the tradition of the we dreaming afloat. It is not a wreck. It is not a project of reclamation or grieving. I am aware of the bodies. This is not about looking into the horror. This is not unaware of the horror. This is not a blind eye. This is a an eye in search of a we. I am not a we. I am aware I am not a we. I am not a we. I am only a me dreaming of a we. I am so dreaming of a we. It's a hard dream the we. It's a hard dream the we. The dream is a singular trajectory. The power of the dream of the single trajectory. The power of the disease of the dream of the single trajectory. I find it hard to give up the dream of the single trajectory. I find it hard to give up the I but I want the we. I want the we to include everybody. Every body that wants to be a me inside a we. A grand we or a specific we it is a we we need. Not a flattening we I know we have had a flattening we. The we that makes the you disappear. Not that we. Not the erasing we. We need a non-erasing we. I am dreaming of an unruly we. I am dreaming of we so vast and bright it blinds the noses. A we beyond categories. A we beyond the garden of yes or no. Not a formal we. Not an upright we. Not an uptight we. A we that is an endless band of wes.

Who are the we? Who are the we you assume? You assume we? You assume we? You assume a wee out there on the ocean? A we in a boat. A wee in a boat afloat? A we? Who do you assume in we?

*

I propose the we is a motherhood nation.

I propose motherhood as a voluntary nation.

I propose men as mothers and boardrooms to be full of mothers. I propose mothers in suits. Mothers in robes. Mothers in hard hats. Mothers in khaki pants patrolling borders.

I propose the mail man and the president of the power company to think like a mother.

It is a motherhood proposition.

The you in me is a motherhood proposition.

The me in you is a motherhood proposition.

The we in we is a motherhood proposition.

The root is a motherhood proposition.

*

We want to remain delicate. Above all we think, polite is a good bias. A good cut. We think style is a passport. It's not a temporary affair it is a style that opens doors. It is a chiffon dream of a sweet victory a breast in the air and a sweet retreat.

The doors are a great explore.

“We seem to be drifting helplessly in a strange world of unreality” (2:00 PM - 29 Mar 2015).

*

Consider this:

On The Endurance we noted the air cooling. We set sail (I want you to know this is a fantasy) in the morning (I want you to know I'm uncertain of the time). We set sail with our stores laid in (we mean food and drink) and our children (we have no idea how many). We wanted to observe childhood the way our mothers did (we brought them with us where we could). We wanted to take note of their bodies (the childrens' and the mothers') we wanted to tell you how surprised we were that they stood on their own so soon (the childrens' and the mothers') they were all sizes, lanky, toddling, rolling, slooping. We were ready for years of writhing and unfurling (we had seen the safety videos) but they turned to look at us like the sun zooming in for a burn (they searched the land with such promise we felt full and at attention). Is it always this way with wild children and wild mothers?

Their infant heads turned like sunflowers and we set out.

Sunflowers are a never-aging affair.

7. THE INNER ACTION

Revelation comes in waves, as though you have swallowed a million Moons, a million small levers that turn on tears, the gears, Yes, they open, and like the tongues of frogs lolling In a subterranean room, your body heaves its *Come home, Come home*, as though you are giving birth to a typhoon.

For a long time the poems had to be broken, locked in razor Wire. Syntax ticked like a tumble lock in a safe, quiet as film Silence. I won't say that blood didn't course through the verse But I will say that as a requirement for a poem's success It was overrated and highly specious.

Still, it comes, clarity, in waves of Wolf moons. It comes like The ice storm covers all my limbs with a yearning to take Communion with you, the unknown man in blue with bare hands Worrying over a fellow man on Saint Catherine, The temperature having dipped to minus twenty-five With wind-chill.

I said the poem shouldn't be wrapped in wool so thick That the thud of a heart doesn't register.

All over the world the dispossessed coil out of the asylum, Or toward asylum, as the roots of oak and fir are wound Into nests. You watch your loved ones explode like gas flares. You search for words to unleash the blood swelling up Against your heart. There is a Walmart where you once praised The rain, ate the wild mushroom and slithered into the river Like a Boa, fat on the many un-lived childhoods, coils and waits.

6. A PIECE OF TOAST

On board one day is refashioned out of the next.
A conversation becomes a clothesline,
Frozen diapers dipped in the toaster,
Even death becomes an outfit, a lens, a tree,
The hours before daylight are a vague
Memory of ice calving, hours we enumerate
Like a rosary, like a favourite day we can lick
And lick, like a cat with its back legs outstretched

Meanwhile the mothers let the cooking grease
Accumulate on their skin, apt protection
Against frostbite. Others push their poussettes
Through the snow banks toward a bath house,
Others bath themselves like Polar Bears
In snow, snow and out on the ice the mothers
Calving away from each other into unique,
Inhabitable springs.

*

Left on their own they kneeled in a circle, swaddled bums in the air. We
sat around them like a pride of sea lions chewing our kindling into dolls.

In this way, days passed. We tended our fire, ate seal fat, fed the babies.
Periodically the navigator peered out of the wheel house, asking for advice
about his feelings and we all responded at once, with lively adverbs.

All day we knit the air astutely with our sticks. Naturally we all used cloth
diapers it was wash, hang, wash, hang, wash, hang.

We dried the turds for later use.

We floated into a new possibility.

We paid tribute to the mothers of mothers.

*

It wasn't a treasure, or a whale we were on the look out for it was simply
a corner of the earth.

We were women wanting to leave our trace on the history of the world.

We were adventurers, we had signed up for life.

*

We saw so few mothers outside of our pod—like a lone sea lion with her
bastard cub—we pressed against the parlour glass like herrings.

We were no Little Mermaids, we had never been prim in heels, we had
walked pavement keenly and without direction.

*

When we went out onto the social networks for air, tying ourselves in six
packs readying ourselves for sudden flashes of light “...for it is well-known
that darkness is more permeable to the ‘wireless’ waves than light” (6:00
PM - 29 Mar 2015), we planted bright orange flags as we writhed forward,
a net of fish, smelling our way back to the sea.

“Hitherto we have received no signal at all” (4:00 PM - 29 Mar 2015).

3. ARCHITECTURE OF ADVENTURE

The average boat requires the children sleep together. The women gather around the fire. It is a medieval smell. They are aware of their own nostalgia for burning. Some of the rooms have walls and floors so thin the cracking of ice can be heard through the night. Ice breaking against itself like street gangs bashing into each other. Angry, entitled, like the Sheriff banging on the door. Like the angry Uncle come for a hand-out or hot meal. They know better than to let him sleep near the children. The floorboards creak like police cars careening down the streets. Dreams slosh like beer glasses on a tray as your hips sway toward the men lined up at the bar. They are tired from knocking things down. They are tired from moving the earth. From puncturing the earth. From paving the earth. From scouring the earth. From scarring the earth. From trading the earth. They line up somewhere away from the children.

We are trying to rewrite that script. We need a man for the Anthropocene.

*

The children are safer in six packs. Still, some nights the ice like a siren wailing under the ship. The children dream of whales with dorsal fins like razor blades that slice through their beds and they wake up screaming.

The women can be on one big boat or smaller boats, stacked. The boats can be strapped together. The boats with great masts, or tied together, the water will be everywhere, and the bergs like strip malls. The cabins can have portholes above or below the water line.

Far out they see an island of men, busy with an inferno, but “mirages are frequent” (4:00 AM - 29 Mar 2015).

There is always such a long way to go. The sun rises and sets in crimson and tangerine.

The red lights are random. They are effective. They admonish the women to slow down.

*

On this planet, now, in the hallway, under the reasonable architecture of the suburbs, out on the soaked decks of our ships, women with shaved chins smoking pipes. Listen there the night is so long texts come wrapped like barber poles, actuality is arms, reaching an angry psychological situation, it is unaware of the foam of fifteen and sixteen, bottles

Listen, some people will never meet you half way and they won't know that they aren't meeting you half way for whatever reason, it doesn't matter, don't be anxious to blame, don't try to explain, don't send a midnight text apologizing for making him feel uncomfortable, you didn't make him uncomfortable, he made himself uncomfortable, or rather, the situation resulted in him being made aware of the limits of his physical and psychological situation and that is uncomfortable, you can't control how people experience you, it's not that you did anything wrong, it's that you presented yourself with shape, or you reached out your arms in a gesture of camaraderie, of understanding body, and this person perhaps, doesn't have arms, I mean, he has physical arms, but not arms, you know, he can't actually reach outside of himself because he doesn't know that there is an outside of himself...this is shocking, these tiny moments when he sees outside of himself...he grows uncomfortable, angry, seeing there is something outside of himself, this is only one variation on the discomfort of one human being with another, the no arms status, there are other explanations, more or less generous, the fact is he doesn't know he's not connecting, and you can keep trying to extend your skirt across the subway platform every time you see one of him, he will just keep tripping on your skirt and thinking *Bitch, why do you extend your skirt into my space?* So really there is no use being angry at someone without arms, you can't embrace a man without arms, or a woman with arms, people without arms are often, and understandably, angry, compassion is often, and understandably seen as condescension, so you know, I don't know, you can't be angry at a person for not having arms even if they don't know they don't have arms and are beating you with ghost limbs you have to protect yourself, but you can't be angry, you just can't be angry you have to protect yourself but you can't be angry, you just can't be angry, you have to do something with your rage.

I said, I thought it might have been better to move down the bank and be ready to receive them. I was trying to rationalize my hesitation.

All the old logic. All the old moves. All the old favourite parts of my life boarded up, tagged, bombed by errant boys in superscript, whose logic passes like satellites and settles forever in storm drains.

*

Ethical parenting. Ethical teaching. Ethical poeming. I am no longer concerned about the rate of pay for poets, what I worry about is the poetry of escape. I worry about a poetry that wants to escape labour. A poetry that wants to be in the center of all the other poetries. I worry about a poetry that erases.

I am less afraid of the desire to be a beautiful poem than the desire to be a glorious cock among the adoring flowers.

The adoring cock whacking off as it rides a motorcycle down the highway.
(Patricia Lockwood)

I feel like a machete when I walk down the hall, all the little cocks shrivel.

*

You have to understand that in poetry I am much bolder than I am in life. I will send my message out and cower under a fir tree but I will not cower when the hammer falls.

I will not cower:

When the poem unfurls like a sea of red across the land.

*

If you are against crowns don't vie for a crown in reaction to the crown you hate.

All of your social positioning fills my feed, like schools of fish you blossom with hate.

I see your social positioning and I raise you a social confrontation.

*

We wanted to be methodical in our dreaming. To get one boat. Get all the women on board. Get the one boat, an entire team, but we lacked organization. We set out in our minds, just willing ourselves, we thought if Noah could build it. If Shackleton could build it.

*

There is always not enough, only just enough. The mothers gather their tobacco, their braids, they braid and roll tobacco, they go to the end of the deck and peer out "They climb, trembling, upwards, spreading out into long lines at different levels, then contract and fall down."

"Bergrs and pack are thrown up in the sky and distorted into the most fantastic shapes" (5:00 AM - 29 Mar 2015).

No one understood how the floes could freeze us, lifting our boats up onto the ice like lame seals.

"The surface is precisely similar to a ruined city made of ice"
(Orde-Lees)

Once stuck, we made out across the ice on sleds with pack dogs, but it was only a dream, only a long, bumpy dream.

4. A FIRM DENIAL

No, we did none of that.

On the Endurance we sailed against devastation.

We chronicled the island of floating garbage.

There was “A keen wind from the south and exceptionally cold...” we dipped our nets in the water. We carried out important investigations (7:00 AM - 30 Mar 2015).

We counted fins for example. We counted waves.

We dredged and hoveled, our nets dragged up evidence of human interference everywhere (7:00 AM - 23 Mar 2015).

We brought up “[glacial mud, several pebbles and rock fragments, three sponges, some worms, brachiopods, and foraminiferae” (8:00 AM - 23 Mar 2015).

When a woman has to give birth we drop anchor and breathe with her.

On this boat, it is the only boat. We put our nets and glasses aside. We breathe with her. We stop and breathe. We have this idea that the earth will be wiped clean, we have said no. We have said no to privatizing the commons. We are here, floating, we have answered the call, nothing more, we have answered the call.

*

In the future, the water rises and all we have is our wits. We women, all we will have is our wits.

We keep the boat moving.

We ride faith like a surfer.

5. INTERLUDE OF A PRE-BOARDING ADVENTURE

We had no idea how the space around us would change. We understood that babies were lousy paperweights, utterly useless kites, but we were doubling ourselves. We were adding people to the planet, a planet we thought, surely there is a corner of our apartment we have not yet seen? Doubling requires space.

The vessel was readied. We tried to be serious about this despite the theoretical babies seemingly like party favours.

We are not relaying the information in a timely manner. We did nothing in a timely manner.

We put the minimalist Ikea cribs together with the help of an Audrey Hepburn character, her arms spun like hairpins. Surely a good omen, the strategic placing of a Shakespeare professor at this point in the narrative. Once the cribs were in I slipped the red cotton fitted sheets like socks over my hands and the cribs stood like two quatrains ringed with owls. Nature, says George Elliott Clarke, is a luxury for white people. The introduction of owls to the nursery the first of the privileges we pass on. The floors appeared to tilt, a sound like the cracking of ice long before the ice built up in the window.

They are tiny people who speak a foreign language, she said. They come in pairs. The Shakespeare professor bought a castle with a turret so the babies could rehearse their scenes, that they are always part of a pair somehow balances the fact that they speak a foreign language.

All babies speak a foreign language, she said, but ours speaks more insistently, right? No, not quite. Ours are both special and not special. They are special to us they are not special in relation to the world. They deserve no more than all children. We will not buy them a crown.

I dreamed the babies fell off a bridge and that I thought for a moment before jumping in after them.

That's the problem, the partner said, suddenly one moment is long enough to swallow an entire city.