

# Simpatico by Renee Simms

My aunt, the scientist, who behaves like a writer, the one with stacks of books between her furniture; aunt who is alone by choice with unopened boxes all over her home; doctor-aunt, microbiologist-aunt, the one with cookbooks from around the world; aunt like a redwood tree; the one whose tests have come back normal but who needs a hearing aid; aunt who rode her bicycle across D.C., who visits farmers' markets and Vietnamese restaurants, who hated working for the FDA; Depression Era Aunt, War Time Aunt, woman who raised a son and daughter, who is closer to her son than to her daughter; aunt who strode from wedlock laughing; favorite aunt, the one with a single sibling left, who has buried a mother, two sisters and one brother, whose father was not around; aunt as traveler, as speaker of many tongues; the one who saves me the Times Book Reviews and hands them over in a plastic bag; my aunt who would read a praise poem that I wrote asked on Saturday if I'd write her obituary

# The Death of Soul by Renee Simms

My first love did not come for me
On horseback, that was impractical.
Too much concrete on my block.
Too noisy for a horse, as well—
The tambourine shakes, doo-wop harmony &
In every other house lived slick, pretty
Men who could sing.
So he rode the FM airwaves, instead,
Guitar riffs on his tongue.
We were post-Motown but miracles
& temptations still lingered in
Our men with bass guitar voices
Our men who built pyramid homes. Our men drove
Cadillacs glossed by the moon & all this magic made me
One peculiar girl.

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On our first date my love handed me The center of a flower, no petals. "Seduction is a principle," he said & Because he was royalty, I believed. Pamela's daddy, who sang backup, did not like him. "Pornographic," her daddy said, "The devil," Mama would say But what did they know? Pam's daddy had Mistresses as vacant as Smokey's house & Motown was dead at the edge of a continent, The pious heel-spins by suited men Cliches we no longer used. I tape recorded my lover's songs, Sketched his impish face upon schoolbooks. One night I cried to him about the future & he cupped my face inside his purple hands. It was 1977.

"Nothing is permanent," he whispered, "Not neighborhoods or soul music,"
Then my street went quiet as catholics & All the dark, polished men were gone.

"The Death of Soul" first appeared in *Inkwell Journal* in Spring 2003. It was reprinted in *Voices from Leimert Park: A Poetry Anthology* (Tsehai Publishers 2006).

### Naming Things by Renee Simms

She is seven & she likes trees. The aspirin-white trunks that crowd nearby fields, the trees that drop hard berries for the boys to throw, trees that sprinkle helicopter seeds.

"Birch, Purple Crab & Norway Maple," her father says, but she thinks: Lollipop Sticks, Hump-Backed Witch. A Flurry of Paper Wings.

She never asks why her father can name every genus of tree or why, haunted by the forests of Georgia, he moved north to a state just as green.

Her school is Magnolia Elementary. When she plays hard at recess her hair escapes its careful braids & hangs in strands like a willow.

Her mother is sad like a willow—sudden mushrooms wherever she walks. Each night begins with the pop of wooden corks & low-flying birds in the halls.

This is what she will recall from inside her family treehouse. They live two blocks beyond city limits and are safe from everything save themselves.

# Marriage by Renee Simms

Consider this burning, this desire.

This feather on a pond this pond life underneath this rabbit in a hat this hot sauce burn on mouth

this salted licorice this insomnia walk of ghosts this turning turning sleepless

this blue light this African rock this love.

Consider this jellyfish. This doubling doubling egg this trampoline laughter these balloon soft skulls

this family SUV these tires worn thin these beads on a string this microscopic language

this you with morning frost and midnight moon and noon lunch

this 24/7 dance-off this roadburn hurt this flowering bush this sweet sour sweet these toes and tongue an ear breath brain your spleen my bone our atoms this experiment

this explosion this everywhere

that loops and turns and soars

a kite in hand

#### Belle Isle by Renee Simms for Deletha Word

Through the window of a yacht club is a bride. She does not feel beautiful although her makeup is exquisite, a peacock's tail upon her face.

As a girl, she watched her mother paint herself lovely each morning, at the kitchen table, using one round, drugstore mirror and tubes of browns and reds.

Today her mother looks plain by comparison and busies herself by touching lipstick on the cheek of each guest at the party.

Every face smiles, since

no one can know tomorrow a daughter becoming her mother, the loss of a breast. Jail and its erasure of your soul.

Today is today full of kisses and wine brown hands brushing the hem of organza.

To know the family's misery you must notice the grandmother's hands, the rivers for veins and floorboard knuckles or see that those in attendance laugh a little too much or that after the *Amen*, the bar.

To know the city's misery understand that where they gather is Belle Isle, a place once covered with fallow deer though lately it is broken glass.

That on the island the Saturday before this wedding young people witnessed a woman's beating then watched her arch as if on a low table and dive naked into the river to die But today is today, full of kisses and wine, the bride's mother always with a glass, the bride, drunk herself, repeatedly falls but hands are swift to raise her up.

The father, a quiet man of numbers jitterbugs as if on fire and soul records play louder and faster, throwbacks that remind everyone of days before blight, days when signers and songwriters

danced at weddings, went to ballgames, the city-blocks crammed with teachers living next to musicians who knew mechanics who married doctors

"Belle Isle" first appeared in *Voices from Leimert Park: A Poetry Anthology*, Tsehai Publishers, 2006.