

Katajjait

A bear rooting.
A woman in labor.
Seals sounding under water.
The mourn of intense grief.
Two squat women pull away released by a spurt of giggles.
Their mouths now open fully in glee, toothless, apple dolled, ageless,
ancient.
Leaning inward from the waist, moccasined feet planted firmly.
Naomi Itquik faces Olive Inhakatsik.
In heavy quilted robes only the faces so close brown noses almost
touch.
A deep breath: that incredible beat of katajjait begins.
Guttural nasal breathing, tonal from throat, from stomach.
Voice and voiceless pitch.
Throat singers from the Eastern Arctic.
Wordless, without melody, a game.
Who will give in first?
Naomi or Olive.
Who can last longer?
Olive or Naomi.
Make her laugh Olive.
Take her breath away Naomi.
A challenge of hard work, this belabored breathing.
In a cave deep below.
Enveloped in the beat of sound above.
Increasing echo of the constant rhythm of inhale, exhale.
So close the carbon dioxide will make her laugh.
One more effort Naomi.
Take her breath away Olive.
Those long arctic nights at Baker Lake.
The Northwest Territories.
A poetry of itself, the sound of emotion.
Laughing gas the challenge.
Opportunity won't thwart invention here.
Those long nights of the long season.
Take her breath away.

Naomi Rachel