

POETRY/PERFORMANCE

SYLIVA HAMILTON

Three Poems

1. Labrador Child

Everyone join hands she said
He took her hand
looked at the palm,
the back and fingers.
Slowly, carefully
he began to rub.

His eyes looked ahead
fingers still rubbing
now, more vigorously.

He looked.
No change.
The smooth
brown colour
remained.

It's okay, she told him,
it won't come off—
it's supposed to be there.
I tried to rub it off too
one time, when I was young.

2. Chocolate, Mars Bars and Other Euphemisms

My daughter told me
a little white boy
called her chocolate
during gym class the other day.
This is 1990.
She is 5 years old.

Ottawa
the nation's capital
I was 21.

On my way to work
with the sun warm on my back.
Someone
(UWM—an unidentified white male)
called me a Mars Bar.
Didn't eat candy
so only knew it was
some kind of chocolate bar.

Saw one in a store the next day.
Mars Bar
Black, black wrapper
with red letters.

When I was 5
the invective of choice
was
tarbaby *n. as in 'you little tarbaby'*
or for emphasis,
'you little black tarbaby.'

Euphemisms.
My daughter
when trying to choose
will say
eeny, meany miney mo
catch a tiger by the toe ...

I cringe.
For years and years
and then some
I never knew
it was a tiger
you caught by the toe

Eeny meany miney mo
Catch a ——
can't speak it even to myself
though it speaks itself
each time she says the rhyme.

Why is it
I remember this
but can't remember
who my grade 4 teacher was
what clothes I wore in grade 5.

Chocolate, Mars Bar,
tarbaby,
and the other,
that which replaces tiger.

Euphemisms.

And
what will she remember
when she's 21?

3. Carolyn

She kept her teeth in her pocketbook.
She didn't need them
except on mornings like this
when she was having her photo taken.
It was 8 dot, dot 15.
That's how she read digital clocks.
She lingered around the doorway.
Pushed her trolley around the hall,
past the Exit sign, the ice machine
and the crib
which had sat beside the elevator
for five days now.
But there was progress she thought.
Someone at least had folded it down.
It's not standing ready
to receive some unwilling baby.