

MÔRE, MUMMY!

*South African Maids, My Sisters*

In the evenings,  
they leave the wide, stainless kitchens,  
untangle themselves  
from plump pink arms and hands,  
dust stray blond strands from their aprons,  
and saunter out into the breeze  
of each other's laughter.

They are stately figures  
poised at the curbs  
or seated squarely on the grass,  
legs straight out in front,  
with the walls of the owners' houses  
a backdrop  
to their daily consultations.  
Together briefly, they review the details  
of servitude,  
confess how oblivious abuse has cut them  
like broken glass in a sink.  
They fabricate reasons to be gay;  
count the rands they have saved  
in knotted handkerchiefs  
to pay their children's school fees,  
or to one day have a house  
of their own.

In the "free" space just at the gutters,  
outside the mechanized gates,  
and beyond the barking dogs,  
they make strong medicine for each other.  
They will live through the arrogance  
of the children they nurse.  
They will keep things neat.  
They will not waste or break or ruin.

When they are alone  
in narrow beds like prison bunks,  
their sighs will rise in the dark  
like a voile of prayers  
above the big houses where they work.

"Môre, Mummy!"

"Good morning, Mrs.!"

"Yes, Mummy!"

The day begins.

The pink burdens clamor for her back.

There is the broom

the mop

the bucket  
the heap of dirty clothers  
the bleach  
the iron  
the stove....

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