

PIECES OF WOMAN

Poems by
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Poet, journalist, short story writer, and social worker, Miriam Alves was born in São Paulo in 1952 and has been a staunch activist in the literary Afro-Brazilian Quilombhoje movement of São Paulo since its inception in the early 1980s. Miriam Alves began publishing her poems and stories in the movement's magazine, *Cadernos Negros*, aimed at the public recognition of the Black literature culture of Brazil. Among her publications are two collections of poems, *Momentos de busca* (1983) and *Estrelas no dedo* (1985). Her writing has also appeared in the American literary journal, *Callaloo* and in *Fourteen Female Voices from Brazil: Interviews and Works* (2003), selected and edited by Elzbieta Szoka. Miriam Alves has co-edited with Carolyn Richardson the bilingual anthology, *Finally – Us: Contemporary Black Brazilian Women Writers* (1995).

PIECES OF WOMAN

It is I
who in bed hugs
nibbles at your body
with wanton fervour

It is I
tired restless
I fling myself on the bed
biting lips
that taste of absence,
I am that woman

At night
I search the streets one after another,
I see myself squatting in corners
whipped by a certain absence.
I faint
break into pieces

Woman
I am this woman
rolling like confetti
in the palm of your hand

Woman – remnants
the flesh of my loins drying
at the far end of the yard
hanging from the clothesline of your oblivion

Woman – angry
I shake myself against the fastenings
which hold me firmly to this pole

I woman
tear away the visor of pain,
deceitful.

IMAGINING THE WORLD

My world
does not have the dimension
of my stride

where my feet
tread
is the tiniest part
of the world that my
mind navigates.

The soul floats
unbound slow freed
no lines whether geographical
geometric
horizontal or vertical.

And this is the world
in its imaginative freedom
its space of the being (of being)
without limits...

Universal plenitude
without barriers
without walls
without fears
arrogantly contains
words without names
without countries
interwoven
intersected
glimpsing without encumbrance
complete...
loving one another thru all
the pathways and meters
without rhymes
but rat in being

Ah!! my world
is not the place where
my feet tread
it is not finite
the world is three dimensional
it has the time of the mind
the space of the soul
of the creative
imaginative liberty
of a simple human
good and free.

THE MAN

The man
raised his head
attitude instinct
at the exact time
he sees the sun

Dying sun
red horizon...
like blood
sprouting through his hips

Blood without taste
without salt, without pain
a consequence ... mere carelessness

The man bit
his lip, voice, chant
at the hour of obscenity

Man whose face
confronted itself
clashing
with the reigning brightness

Man
scarcely a human
a God
offended
enfeebled.

Man-God
his knees
did not lower themselves to earth

With the backs of his hands
sticky liquid
with a sob.
He completed the act
without fear
without pain or rancour
He did not swallow the obscenity
indigestible food.

I had
the diffuse
indecisive
impression
of hearing the world
say:
– “Amen”.

WHEN

When nothing else survives
my dreams will be left
emptily hanging
caught on the clothes hangers

When nothing else survives
my hopes will be left
in readiness on the corner
of the street
tinting the blue of the horizon
with my fiery screams.

When nothing else survives
my memories will be left
dallying
hand in hand
with what I might have been.

STARS ON ITS FINGER

One day the future will come
bringing stars on its finger
honey on its lips
hope on its feet

It will sit afloat an imaginary torrent
come down the streets
without fear of having
its emotions assaulted

It will go out without false identity papers
it will enter all places
wearing a person's simple smile
its only image

One day the future will
bring about all imagining
truths.

OLD CLOTHES AND NUDITY

I put on my clothes
old clothes
the rags I took out of the closet
I looked in the mirror and did not see
my eyes
I grasped the bars
the handrails of my memory
plummeted in a sullen
Crazy tumble
into a dark well.

The rags I wore
were lost in the spaces
(useless tatters)
And as I fell full length on the ground
in the puddle of this life
I felt ashamed of my nakedness
I looked for the old tattered clothes
but did not find them.

Cold ran through my guts
all my negritude displayed
through the
skin
shocking the world
as the world shocks me

I looked for
hand
handrail
I asked for forgiveness on my knees
I looked in the mirror
strange decomposed figure

ME...
I noticed I was naked
I spoke in a hoarse, tongue-tied
voice
said so many foolish things
that on reaching my mouth
they fell into the void
without an echo
without a reply.

STRUGGLE FOR THE IDEAL

I woke up in the solitude of life
of colours
of loves
of a vision of the ideal
I planned to eat the sandwich crumbs
of others' dreams...
without illusion
without perspective.

I thirstily gulped down
indigestible food
scratching my throat
mad with screaming
with trying

I suddenly saw
my mouth gagged
and the bound
discoloured clayish feelings
of days gone by.

Looking out at the void
I thought
(I know of the force that comes from above
obstructing the ascent
pulling downwards
always with more force
so that people cannot go up
and until they fall seated
in the puddle of mud)
at the same instant I reacted
pinned down the thought
time to change everything

I have a sword
inherited from an ancestor...
D. Quixote (perhaps)
Real true sword

Armed for war
my aching throat recovered...
I shouted to myself

“ – I go to Battle!!!
I go to fight!!!
Defending an ideal...
Real and true.”
I went out
drawing the sword
inherited from a past
in the battle of reaction

DESIRE

I pour down now from the rooftops
last gutter but one

I grind my teeth
a rabid thirsty dog

I dance a soundless waltz
with my crippled legs

Flight without wings
embellishments of freedom

Without weapons
I tear ideas to pieces

I murder a thousand soldiers.

I wake up crying.

SEXUAL FONDLING

It's the swaying of the hips
it's the teasing
at my window
without allowing herself to be taken
it's the sleeping in my bed
kindling my being's
desire...
without allowing myself to be taken

It's the teasing
my mind is just the same
it's the implicit thought
shaking at the window of consciousness
without being taken

Sometimes in the darkest hours
furtively
she lies down in my bed
marks her presence
by staining the sheet
then moves vain
intact
swaying her voluminous hips
and my gluttonous sensual
eyes...
just gaze
my hands want to touch
the curves of her body
and does not have them
only the stains
as souvenirs
left
on the sheets of my mind

INTOXICATED

And like someone who gets drunk on himself
Goes out beating his head
on the posts
walls
masonry
her legs trotting
in the puddles
in beds
conspicuous in her dirt
itching
insatisfaction

Becoming totally rusty
under the rain
of words
spit of sperm

Doing somersaults
pirouettes backflips
coming out mortally alive
superficially wounded
getting drunk
fighting with everything
and faith obliging it
to drink and satiate itself
with sores

And life
raining day after day
pushing
headlong
this being
anyway it likes

MOMENTS OF SEARCH

In this way existence goes on
dragging itself along...

One more day...

one loss...

one discovery.

It plots its course
towards a common
death...

The moments are moments
moments of search
Boundless discoveries

Affable encounters
discarded discouragements

The rustling of the hours
the sound of the instant
of the instinct...

The light that is switched on
in the moon that shines
in the sun making space
the clouds...
black clouds

One more day
And I am close
to the sure, common
and immutable course

Certainty of the end
taste of salt
and of earth

Eternal moments
incessant search
few successes
difficult and incomputable
blunders...

Love, pardon, tears
and the hand along the arm
wanting to touch
the flash of truth

The mind infusing
the entire human body
sweet coloured
excuses and sugar-plums
into words.

Words...
they soften, cherish
...they do not comply.

Certainty, illusion hope
Summary, of the dragging
of the moments of search
of the search of moments

The epilogue...
Concludes,
with daily presentation
of a new prologue
always a new prologue
right up to the final epitaph

Death...
death of the moment
death of the moment of the search
in the unfastening of doubt
in the quest
in life itself.

ANGUISH

The hours do not go by
the days, the seconds
the year does not end

Anguish screams out
so strongly
so loudly
the eardrums think of bursting

The head reverberates
and aches in the seriousness
of a smile which is
ill-formed, ill-willed
ill-given

The honey burns
the tongue
cutting forever
the simple tone of things
that are
foolish
hot
calm
good.

EGOISM

I am egotistically sad
The evening breeze whistles
in my ears

I am egotistically sad
life marches past as always
the wind blows whispers
things without connexion

I am egotistically deaf

The square stirs into motion
in the endless coming and going
people passing by...

I am egotistically still.

People sit on benches
trying to see... (the void?)

I am egotistically blind.

The hawker
sells in the very center...
São Paulo
miraculous herbs.
The multitude surrounds him
buy promises of a cure

I am egotistically healthy

The smile of the old man on crutches
does not have healthy teeth
(toothpaste publicity)

I am egotistically serious.

Hands stretched out
Coins received from begging
The square...
the evening...
the wind...

Wind blowing...
anguished
ruffling clothes
papers
trees

I am egotistically
deaf
mute
blind.

The movement of things
awakes in me
an ill good-health

I am in an egotistic resistance
without tears
without laughter
without...