

1975

# Talking to My Grandmother Who Died Poor Some Years Ago

Alice Walker

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torn from proud black chests, from open stilled mouths,  
from wide nostrils and ebony bones and now reading me.

How I ache from being opened in these hours and cut  
by these mountains and two rivers.

Who were you once in marble reincarnation? A statue,  
a flesh carved god? A rock leading to mountaintops?  
Who you will be next will meet me; that is why  
we cannot say goodbye here.

*Rivers keep swelling and swelling, keep cutting  
mountains, keep washing the Roman stone,*

And one man lifts his wings; his neck veins stretch  
alive though the sun boils him and this land heats  
a kiln, this history a steady fire and two rivers burn:

*We begin to heal ourselves  
by our own believing—*

The clay now bakes its own warning and the statued  
marble collects the blood prizes. But can these words  
too become bronze breathing, or rock hardened  
and cut tall to ride horseback in Haiti,  
to swing machete *and still dance?*

Talking to My Grandmother Who Died  
Poor Some Years Ago / Alice Walker  
*(while listening to Richard Nixon declare "I am not a crook.")*

no doubt i will end my life as poor as you  
without the wide verandah of your dream  
on which to sit and fan myself slowly  
without the tall drinks to cool my bored  
unthirsty throat.  
you will think: Oh, my granddaughter  
failed to make something of herself  
in the White Man's World!

but i am not a crook  
i am not a descendent of crooks  
my father was not president of anything  
and only secretary to the masons  
where his dues were a quarter a week  
which he did not shirk to pay.  
that buys me a new dream  
though i am weak and i may slip  
and lust after jewelry  
and a small house by the sea:  
yet i could give up even lust  
in proper times  
and open my doors to strangers  
or live in one room.

that is the new dream.

in the meantime i hang on  
fighting  
addiction  
to the old dream  
knowing i must train myself to want  
not one bit more  
than what I need to keep me alive  
working  
and recognizing beauty  
in your still undefeated face.

## Nightmare Begins Responsibility / Michael S. Harper

I place these numbed wrists to the pane  
watching white uniforms whisk over  
him in the tube-kept  
prison  
fear what they will do in experiment  
watch my gloved stickshifting gasolined hands  
breathe *boxcar-information-please* infirmiry tubes  
distrusting white-pink mending paperthin  
silkened end hairs, distrusting tubes