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Stephanie Strickland

— *Muriel Rukeyser, 1913-1980*

She said disowning
is the only treason. She said we pretend
coldness, or pretend
we are used to the world.
She said
all I touch has failed,
and the beginning was real
She said by imagining
the child can cope with loss,
be at home.
It is a work of images, difficult
and bare. Very slow. Like falling in love.
Desire shadows its fulfillment.
She said
now I speak only words I can believe:
no sly resonant pity.
Her short questions, the gravel
of her answers comes back to me again
and again, in waves:
turn with your whole life choosing.
Everything here is real, she said,
and of our joy. Her mother
didn't answer. Even past death
language incomplete
between them. Intense desire
scorches its fulfillment.
Muriel, the ashes
rise, the ashes are flying.