

Can I Hold a Village?

by **Victoria King**

Can one person hold a village? Bear the message of lineage?
Can one person hold a people, a country, a faith, a race,
A way of seeing, of being?
A legacy?

Is this me?

Could I be that container, floating on waters
Captured and caught and still holding that message,
As a mother to my daughter?
That message whose nuance is so rich and so deep, so pungently technicolour-sweet
And then agonisingly elusive and fleet
But there, like a handprint
Indescribably perfect.

For yes, that message lies in me, swells through me
In the deep, blood-heavy thud in me,
Swelling and abating, flood-like
Washing, enveloping, leaving me wanting
Gasping, for I am unable not to hold this message
And tend it, and send it
In the milk of my breast
With the heft of my chest
Along the glide of my breath
Through the slick of my sweat
Imbued in my smiles, my tears, my cries, denials
My lullabies to my child.

Can one person whisper the wilds
Of the shushing trees that push and ease
The bulge of their girth through rock-layered earth?
Can they breathe the plumes of blue sky crags and silver streams,
Of smoke curls leaving evening fires?

Can one person perspire
The honey-rich sweetness of dates hanging uneaten?
Or hum the buzzing burr of flies
Snatching at dust-filled eyes
That are deep and brimming with love.

Am I enough?

My mother held all this in me
For me
As did her mother, and her mother, and her mother

... And so on forever.
Our heredity, our legacy.

But now, how can I find a way?
A castaway, no longer there
Encumbered, deracinated, gasping for air
Grasping
For the clutch of home, for the certainty of knowing.

I am suffocating, alienated, carved in two by the currents that rage in me,
Claw at me.
And yet their power enables me.
And so determinedly, I make my plea:

My child, let me try.