

Three Poems: ‘Driven to Sleep’, ‘No Idle Hand’, ‘In Fourteen Hundred and Ninety-Two A Bookmark Took the Place of a Story Some Years Later I Made a Childhood Promise’

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Driven to Sleep

Not statehood, not
Dustbowl
Navy brought my dad
Flint Hills Cherokee
To San Francisco
Love held him
Pole climber
Nicked hands
My fear of heights isn't for me
How do you make a prayer solid?
Slip it into the pocket of someone you love
Safe for the moment
He put himself in danger to put food on the table
Love held him to the job
To the table
Green painted oak
Third hand but
Solid stuff
He'd strap a cardboard box in the car
Me in it
Drive me to sleep
New stories
Old stories made solid
Nicked hands
The smell of cardboard
Rolling west

No Idle Hand

In this place
Life must be ransomed

Grandma was hotel housekeeping
Had her ordering dance
A ceremony of things moving from place to place
Read the newspaper
Did the crossword puzzle
Bought the mystery cans at the supermarket
Picked wild blackberries on the San Francisco hills and
Made jam

In this family we bustle
Human honeybees
Community of sisters
Dancing the direction of the gathering

When the sun went down city lights out the porch window
She would stand me on the kitchen step stool
And we would quiet stare
Contemplate the catalog of things turned to stone

**In Fourteen Hundred and Ninety-Two A Bookmark Took the Place of a Story
Some Years Later I Made a Childhood Promise**

Those teachers stared me right in the face and lied by limitation
Not enough of us in this city to argue
I told the ripples in the bay water that I would tell our stories
In a city accent
In all of the colors that I had come to know
You music men who steal the daughters
You collectors who steal the bones
You who are fancy with magpie scatter
Well I'm a magpie too
Pick words from the cracks in the sidewalks
Spin a thread from them
Tie powerful knots and snare you
With a truth so glorious
So edge lit
In emotions you have no words for
That my promise to the water will be met
And you will not be able to look away

Author Bio

Kim Shuck is Ani Yun Wiya and Goral and was born in San Francisco in the fret and shift of the 1960s. Shuck has various degrees which include an MFA from San Francisco State University. She has raised children, written books, won awards and encouraged other poets all to the best of her ability. In 2017 she was named the 7th poet laureate of San Francisco. More information about her work can be found at kimshuck.com