

Adrienne Rich

SPLITTINGS

from *The Dream of a Common Language*

1.

My body opens over San Francisco like the day –
light raining down each pore crying the change of light
I am not with her I have been waking off and on
all night to that pain not simply absence but
the presence of the past destructive
to living here and now Yet if I could instruct
myself, if we could learn to learn from pain
even as it grasps us if the mind, the mind that lives
in this body could refuse to let itself be crushed
in that grasp it would loosen Pain would have to stand
off from me and listen its dark breath still on me
but the mind could begin to speak to pain
and pain would have to answer:

*We are older now
we have met before these are my hands before your eyes
my figure blotting out all that is not mine
I am the pain of division creator of divisions
it is I who blot your lover from you
and not the time-zones or the miles
It is not separation calls me forth but I
who am separation And remember
I have no existence apart from you*

2.

I believe I am choosing something now
not to suffer uselessly yet still to feel
Does the infant memorize the body of the mother
and create her in absence? or simply cry

primordial loneliness? does the bed of the stream
once diverted mourning remember the wetness?
But we, we live so much in these
configurations of the past I choose
to separate her from my past we have not shared
I choose not to suffer uselessly
to detect primordial pain as it stalks toward me
flashing its bleak torch in my eyes blotting out
her particular being the details of her love
I will not be divided from her or from myself
by myths of separation
while her mind and body in Manhattan are more with me
than the smell of eucalyptus coolly burning on these hills
3.

The world tells me I am its creature
I am raked by eyes brushed by hands
I want to crawl into her for refuge lay my head
in the space between her breast and shoulder
abnegating power for love
as women have done or hiding
from power in her love like a man
I refuse these givens the splitting
between love and action I am choosing
not to suffer uselessly and not to use her
I choose to love this time for once
with all my intelligence.