

My Mother

Pieced Quilts

TERESA PALOMO ACOSTA

- they were just meant as covers
in winters
as weapons
against pounding january winds
- 5 but it was just that every morning I awoke to these
october ripened canvases
passed my hand across their cloth faces
and began to wonder how you pieced
all these together
- 10 these strips of gentle communion cotton and flannel
nightgowns
wedding organdies
dime store velvets
- how you shaped patterns square and oblong and round
positioned
balanced
15 then cemented them
with your thread
a steel needle
a thimble
- 20 how the thread darted in and out
galloping along the frayed edges, tucking them in
as you did us at night
oh how you stretched and turned and rearranged
your michigan spring faded curtain pieces
my father's santa fe work shirt
25 the summer denims, the tweeds of fall
- 30 in the evening you sat at your canvas
—our cracked linoleum floor the drawing board
me lounging on your arm
and you staking out the plan:
whether to put the lilac purple of easter against the red plaid of
winter-going-
into-spring
35 whether to mix a yellow with blue and white and paint the
corpus christi noon when my father held your hand
whether to shape a five-point star from the
somber black silk you wore to grandmother's funeral
- 40 you were the river current
carrying the roaring notes . . .
forming them into pictures of a little boy reclining
a swallow flying
- 45 you were the caravan master at the reins
driving your threaded needle artillery across the mosaic cloth bridges
delivering yourself in separate testimonies°
- 50 oh mother you plunged me sobbing and laughing
into our past
into the river crossing at five
into the spinach fields
into the plainview cotton rows
into tuberculosis wards
55 into braids and muslin dresses
sewn hard and taut to withstand the thrashing of twenty-five years
stretched out they lay
armed/ready/shouting/celebrating
knotted with love
the quilts sing on