

Cathy Song



THE GIRL CAN RUN

The girl can run.
We marvel
at her tongue.
As fast as her little
legs can carry her
she runs.
She is running
as fast as
her little legs
can carry her
up over the hill
and out of the town.
The girl
can run.
We marvel
at her
tongue,
lizard-quick,
bufo in the bathhouse
lapping up the flies.
Same little girl who shouted
see me see that star?
She's damned if
she doesn't
make it that far.
She's hoarded words,
stuffed and stitched

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her own tough hide.
Old man on the porch swing
doesn't give a shit.
Save it
for yourself,
the old man spits.
The girl can
run. We marvel at her
tongue.
Little legs,
plump and fleabitten,
pump on the sputter
of heart's broken wheel.
Puff puff she pants.
See me see me dance
over the hill
out of the town
past Mother
screaming fists into sheets.
There!
on the clothesline—
so shame!—
everybody can see
all the brown stains.
Puff puff she pants.
See me see me dance
past Sister's kookoo marbles
rolling shut behind
a doll's dull lid.
Nothing to see inside
her head.
Old man spits,
save yourself.
I've got my own
noise to take to bed.
The girl can run.
We marvel at her tongue.

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She takes the short
cut, the cleverest route.
Mean is the speed of her tongue.
Puff puff she pants,
sucking up the air.
All the air
she sucks into her lungs
and runs.
Move out of her way.
Here she comes.
Bufo in the bathhouse
bloats immense on flies.
Tongue turning stones to breadcrumbs.
Badly, has she said it?—
she wants to come home.
At the heart is the fiction
it's only flies.
Shoo! Shoo! Shoo!
At the heart is the drama
of the unloved child.
Now it's spoken—
has she said it?—badly,
she wants to come home.
Here she comes,
pursued by invisible matter.
Flies in the bathhouse
quiver under lies.
No telling
what's behind her.
Invisible matter
carries its own
noise inside
her head.
A sputtering of fists and crazy laughter.
Are you listening, Mother?
Invisible matter
gobbling her up.

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She'll run us over,
peel the skin of the darkest
berries to steal
the darkest stories.
She's damned if she doesn't
take it
that far.
See me see that star.
Gobble us up into crumbs and chatter.
Late nights,
after dinner,
feasted and content,
what-flies-off-the-toothpick-
loose-and-careless
chatter.
The girl can run.
We are struck by the marvel of her tongue.

Cathy Song is the author of Picture Bride (Yale), Frameless Windows, Squares of Light (Norton), and School Figures (Pittsburgh). Her poem "The Sky-Blue Dress" (which appeared in the Summer/Fall 1998 issue of The Kenyon Review) won a 2000 Pushcart Prize. She lives with her family in Honolulu.