

Plant Sanctuary

We didn't know what to call them. Some were clusters of cups with mahogany eyes; others sexual petticoats edged in a mix of reds. I whispered slipper; Cecilia said they look like clitoris.

The glass-enclosed gardens hissed in the steamy heat. We locked arms, then gently bent down to touch the Chinese orchids, their lavender slips spotted with dew, so haughty, we expected a whiskey-edged voice to emerge from the sulfur trumpet. Other orchids, spiked tigers crawling up hardy stems, seemed predatory, designed to last through changes in weather. And why do we suddenly feel hungry, jealous? What about the orange lip set on sepals of dark chocolate, perfectly scored and edged in innuendo. From where we knelt, both of us could mimic the sturdy stems holding up pods, girls showing off their breasts to the dense Woodland ferns tenting the garden.

Fog pawed its way through our hair and vapor shot around us gracefully; polka-dotted female parts in purples and yellows, small enough for our shirt pockets, headed up to the Georgia light. A white-haired man walked about naming the blooms in Latin: Cochlioda, Sophronitis. We giggled clitoris, vulva, areola, pausing to touch the scarlet, the golden-throated, the pendulous ones.

Carine Topal

Carine Topal, a native New Yorker, writes and teaches in Los Angeles. Since 1982, she has anthologized the poetry of special needs children. She participated in the grassroots organization California Poets in the Schools. She was the Poet-in-Residence for the city of Manhattan Beach and Poet-in-Education for Manhattan Beach elementary schools. In 1994, her first collection of poetry, *God As Thief*, was published by The Amagansett Press. Her work has appeared in *Water-Stone*, *Caliban*, *The Best of the Prose Poem*, *Pacific Review*, and many other journals throughout the U.S. and Canada. In 2004, she was nominated for a Pushcart Prize, and in 2005, awarded a residency at Hedgebrook, as well as a fellowship in St. Petersburg, Russia. In 2006, Carine had the good fortune of teaching poetry at the VA Hospital in Los Angeles. She is the recipient of numerous poetry awards, most recently, the 2007 Robert G. Cohn Prose Poetry Award from California Arts and Letters. A special edition chapbook, "Bed of Want," is forthcoming from Pessoa Press.

