

# Heritage

From my mother, the antique mirror  
where I watch my face take on her lines.  
She left me the smell of baking bread

to warm fine hairs in my nostrils,  
she left the large white breasts that weigh down  
my body.

From my father I take his brown eyes,  
the plague of locusts that leveled our crops,  
they flew in formation like buzzards.

From my uncle the whittled wood  
that rattles like bones  
and is white  
and smells like all our old houses  
that are no longer there. He was the man  
who sang old chants to me, the words  
my father was told not to remember.

From my grandfather who never spoke  
I learned to fear silence.  
I learned to kill a snake  
when you're begging for rain.

And Grandmother, blue-eyed woman  
whose skin was brown,  
she used snuff.  
When her coffee can full of black saliva  
spilled on me  
it was like the brown cloud of grasshoppers  
that leveled her fields.  
It was the brown stain  
that covered my white shirt,  
my whiteness a shame.  
That sweet black liquid like the food  
she chewed up and spit into my father's mouth  
when he was an infant.  
It was the brown earth of Oklahoma  
stained with oil.  
She said tobacco would purge your body of poisons.  
It has more medicine than stones and knives  
against your enemies.

That tobacco is the dark night that covers me.

She said it is wise to eat the flesh of deer  
so you will be swift and travel over many miles.  
She told me how our tribe has always followed a stick  
that pointed west  
that pointed east.  
From my family I have learned the secrets  
of never having a home.

**Linda Hogan**