

Spring 1999

The Red Headed Women of Autumn

Kate Braverman

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Braverman, Kate (1999) "The Red Headed Women of Autumn," *CutBank*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 51 , Article 15.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank/vol1/iss51/15>

This Poetry is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in CutBank by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.

THE RED HEADED WOMEN OF AUTUMN

Now the henna, the burgundies and clarets.
It's a season for alcoholics and drug addicts.
Women who wear too much red, tight skirts.
Women who smoke and collect divorces,
run red lights drunk, feeling themselves
coming apart like the landscape
in a brutal confusion of russet and amber.
Here come the red headed women of autumn,
ladies of the lamps, flame, stage.
Gardenias, velvet curtains, and quiet, please.

Autumn never lets me down
with its chorus of inflamed women
drinking tequila and red wine,
finding a way to poison an afternoon.

The women of autumn are in tatters
in debt, unreliable, liars. They sing
out of tune, buy eight-hundred dollar hats,
call Bangkok and Bombay from your phone.
These women have bandages
where they once had mouths.
Circumstance has knocked
their teeth out.

Such women have alphabets of magenta
and orange. They read tarot cards
and know tragedy like a friend.
The women of autumn refuse marriage.
They love ports and salt water,
save pebbles from inland seas.
Such women have improvised childhoods
and fluid destinies, have their palms read
and do not believe in cancer.

There is only flame and thunder,
bouts of rain at 3 a.m. when you
are alone, raw, with your props
black boa, red stilettos.
It's time for another pill or two,
vodka in a crystal goblet.

Last month she sunbathed topless
in Mykanos, rode a motorcycle
from Sorrento to Amalfi,
bought Syrian heroin on the Spanish Steps.
She lost her straw hat between Florence
and Venice, it disappeared like her address
book from Santa Fe, the baby
she had at sixteen and never talks about,
the boy she named Josh
in the language of the deaf
and never touched, not once.

Last week in Cancun, the chartered plane
cast a miniature black replica
like an amulet in a cargo cult
or a milagro from a lover,
meant to be worn at the throat.
It was like a bullet above the mangroves
in their relentless inner sea and I thought
drown now, fire now, one thousand feet
and you will be grace, still, the essence
of limestone and eagles and cocaine.

Of course you can choreograph these women,
how they bend, shudder, twist.
They eat thunder, thin to bone,
wear perfume scraped from the dead.
Their chiffon scarves are burning.
Their mouths are red wells.
They feel fever coming.

Outside, a ruin of maples, a surprise filigree
across branches soft like European gold.
This is the color of remorse.
If this is all I learned in fifty years
it was enough.