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## Portraits of Women

Wanling Su

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## PORTRAITS OF WOMEN

Wanling Su

1.

After her hormone therapy was stopped  
she looked like a man again.  
In the waiting room the nurse called her *Mister*,  
and she had to explain in front of everyone  
that her estrogen treatment was incompatible  
with her cancer treatment, that the prostate cancer  
made her lose  
her breasts.

2.

When the soldiers came,  
her husband offered them all the money  
he had—ten dollars. They laughed  
and shoved him into the cassava patch,  
shoving themselves  
inside him.

Now in the village they call him  
a bush wife. His hands are limp  
as a pair of dead birds.  
These hands shy away from her.

Now she wears sadness,  
her body rigid as a green plum.

3.

She is the one whose daughter  
went to a rock concert  
and never came back.

Treading the cobblestones  
of memory, she rehearses  
what could have been done  
differently—*why did I let her  
walk out wearing fishnets?  
If I called her one more time  
before she got into the car . . .*

The pressure of these thoughts—  
they strain her.

I know, because my son's  
body was found inside a wall  
many years ago.

4.  
Another woman, O,  
lives with them.

O feeds their son.  
While the wife makes breakfast  
O sits on her husband's lap.  
They all laugh together.

The wife is so busy. Such a career.  
She cannot resist the white powder  
offered by the husband  
and shared with O.

When the husband is caught  
the reporters chase her,  
all their cameras going off, as if to announce  
the first day of hunting season.

She pleads guilty.  
She wants to plead a divorce, another life.  
She wishes she could reveal  
to the violent eyes of all the cameras:  
*it is that other woman  
that I love.*