



Image from Totally History

Kathleen Hellen

bird woman

Everything I do is for my people.  
—Sacagawea

she flew out as a bird,  
out of the lungs of Mother Earth  
out of her mouth  
the first words  
*hey ya na*  
to the mountains they would cross,  
to the bog and bloodline,  
to plants, the edible wildness.

she knew the way beyond the Mississippi,  
the road to peace between the tribes upriver and the traders.  
this New World Order pledged to Great White Father.  
the hope

that lay beyond the snakes and ticks, the gnats and mosquitoes,  
beyond where she was kidnapped.

makeshift wagons pushed through cactus thorn and scorching heat,  
through rain and hail storms into canyon, where crippled horses fell  
on rugged hills, in treacherous rivers.

nothing to sustain but candlewax and dog,  
not one Indian until she heard the clucking of the ones  
who traded sex for buttons off their jackets

until they tasted salt  
in waters at the coast, where she had asked to see  
the whale beached in the dust

of ancestors. She would soon be flying home,  
wearing white women's castoffs.

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Kathleen Hellen is the author of three full-length poetry collections, including *Meet Me at the Bottom*, *The Only Country Was the Color of My Skin*, and *Umberto's Night*, which won the poetry prize from Washington Writers' Publishing House, and two chapbooks. Featured on Poetry Daily and Verse Daily, her work has been nominated multiple times for Best of the Net and the Pushcart. She is the recipient of

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