

# “Monologue for Saint Louis” (1984)

by Colleen McElroy (1935 – 2024)



home again and the heart barely there  
when choked by clusters of words  
thick as the clumps of blue-black  
grapes we snitched every summer  
from the neighbor’s arbor (1)  
succulent pockets of flesh laced  
with green staining our lips and fingers

it is summer again and I am home  
vowing penance (2) for all my disappearances  
since that first summer  
when the arbor was clotted

with pockets of grapes latticed on each  
interlocking vine

now earthworms have trellised the arbor  
and that crumbling heap of rotting black  
sticks cannot shield us from wind or words  
we are the women we whispered about each summer  
familiar houses and schoolyards have disappeared  
childhood streets are blocked with singular black  
one-way signs aligned like a lacework  
of warnings or accusing fingers

I am home again  
and my cousins sit in their cloaks of black  
skin dragging me through twisted vines  
of genetic maps thick with childhood vows

they remember each summer  
how each year I vowed to return home  
forever but I am lost in a riddle of words  
home is a vacant lot its back yard clotted  
with a stainless-steel arch (3) and clusters  
of tiny parks sprouting like trelliswork

enclosing some strange summer  
resort my cousins have disappeared  
into like the shadows of beasts and bad air  
that infect this flat country and I am home  
a stranger in love with words  
with tart sweet clusters of poems

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- 1: vining plants trained to grow over a lattice, framework, or trellis
- 2: an act that demonstrates regret and offers amends through self-sacrifice
- 3: the Gateway Arch, a 630-foot-tall arch located in a national park

Learn more about Colleen J. McElroy:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/colleen-j-mcelroy>