

THE BALLAD OF TWO WOMEN

The morning came (it always comes) and with its light struck dumb
My lovers mouth, my crawling hand, my grown-up sense of fun.
And so she lay upon my bed, all naked and alone
But a woman's body cannot always be a child's home.

Her hair was black or was it blue? Her mouth blood red at dawn.
I loved her like a triangle, She loved me like a storm.
And in that storm I sat and read some book on Jewish art
While she slept sweetly, our two heads just inches apart.

The winter came. The winter came. It took our body heat.
It left us in its freezer, two hanging cubes of meat.
She said she knew a rich man and he'd take her away
But I was not as beautiful so I would have to stay.

And when our bodies softened like too-ripe raspberries
The best of us was melted in the juices of our freeze.
I went to smoke a cigarette and find her things to eat
But my legs would not stop walking and my mind followed my feet.

That's how I came to leave her in the early morning sun
Because our bodies had all melted in our mediocre fun.
I'd like to say I'm sorry but that would be a lie.
I'd like to say I loved her but I didn't even try.

Our child was born in winter, the product of two wombs,
Two burlesque seductions, two feminine perfumes.
The girl I lay with long ago has thinned out to a veil
Her hair is wild and whispering, her heart is slow and pale.

She said our child had killed itself in some vain protest march
It shouted: 'No one's listening!' then jumped off Marble Arch.
They left its body there for days, a warning to the crowd:
'This is what will happen if you shout what's right too loud.'

I tried to make her want me, just once for old times sake
But she threw my aching arms off with a rudimentary shake.
Then she told me of the rich man who was taking her away,
And I was never beautiful so I would have to stay.

Vanessa Austin Locke, Brighton, Sussex.
The poem is based on the drawing **Dream** (1952).