

Sharon Chmielarz

## THE ISLANDERS

Why you come, and not expect to pay?  
Sir.  
Eat your *Harpers*.

The useless pay for the taxi man's third ear.  
And the gas.  
And the chicken in his pot.  
He want it.  
He campaign for it.  
He say yes! over the steering wheel,  
"You fix it for me tonight."  
He stop by the store  
right after the useless  
pay their fare and get out.

\*

The soul is very deep.  
Yes, the soul is deep.  
Hard to walk on.  
Harder maybe than snow.  
And not so clean.  
All kinds of things  
wash up on it  
from that ocean,  
things that smell old.

\*

You take Myrtle now.  
You take Myrtle who smells  
like a branch of myrtle.  
You take Myrtle who does  
the laundry, she stuck down there  
in the big room, hot, no windows  
down there with all those carts  
and tubs and dryers.  
That's business.  
That's the business.  
Good business. Myrtle,

rolling the big vat of dirty bedclothes.

“You stay out of sight.”

That Myrtle can glare at those kids.

One fat, one skinny.

Kind of shy and happy.

Sweet. Not angry

like their mommy,

Myrtle. Yet.

\*

Snipping the rhododendron hedge.

Snip snip.

Trimming the rhododendron.

Trim trim.

Don't wanna snip. Don't wanna trim.

Snip snip.

\*

Black butterfly.

Black butterfly a flutter

over the bougainvillea.

Black business going on

up in the night sky.

Ocean going black, too.

Black going way out

into the universe's middle.

All fear and sugar.

\*

Don't start talking now to the woman.

Don't start talking with them women.

You leave them alone.

Those clouds mean nothing.

Those clouds blow over.

Sun gonna blast again.

Don't start talking with the women.

They going help you to your room.

They going get you your fresh towels.

They going bring you a fresh drink.

They got their friends at home.

Don't start talking now to the women.

Them women. You got the clouds.

\*

Banana milk. 1 % low fat.  
U.S. dollar a carton.  
Paper cartons with a picture  
of bright yellow bananas.  
Creamy banana milk  
straight from the banana's  
tit. I go for it.  
I stop by every morning and  
buy a banana milk from the lady.  
Cool lady. Cool, brown lady.  
Cool banana milk.  
Straight from her cooler.  
I drink it right there in the store.  
She works there  
but lives with her mama and daddy.  
She don't work on Sunday.  
"Why they expect me to work on Sunday?  
I got washing to do.  
I got some living to do.  
I got to rest up for opening the store  
door on Monday. Let you in."

\*

I saw clouds the other day.  
I saw clouds, piling up gray.  
I saw clouds, streaming down  
all over from the north.  
I saw clouds and thought it surely would rain.  
I didn't expect snow.  
I surely didn't expect snow.  
Snow clogging up the sky.  
Snow falling over everything,  
spoil  
breakfast outdoors.  
No one called for snow.  
Snow falling over everything.

\*

Now why would someone say a sax  
is like an oboe: Wouldn't you think  
that woman would recognize a sax?

Maybe she was thinking of her fingering.  
But that's way different too.  
She got the mouth thing right—  
the embouchure.  
If you have full lips you have  
to tuck them in to pipe that little  
thin reed. Well, I left her  
and went on to my temp job.  
I left him, too, I left him and went on  
to taking care of a rich woman's roses.  
Same, dry like her husband.  
He come out into the kitchen.  
I told him why I was there in his house,  
I could tell his lip was working hard to trust me.  
Those roses were beautiful though.  
Those roses were just beautiful.  
Almost like a city. You never saw  
such roses as that rich lady's.  
You never touched such rich velvet  
as on those petals. Those roses sang!  
Some other people looking in on me  
in her house, too,  
they didn't recognize me either.  
I could have been a sax or clarinet or oboe.