

# invisible ceremonies

Sandra Birdsell

**L**a, la, la, my child sings in her crib at night, examining her clasped fingers, how they intertwine and come apart and fit together again. She sings, la, la, la, while the animal shapes of a mobile circle the darkening air above her bed, a smiling cat returning and returning, and then not returning. Each night her la, la, la, brings daylight shining in all the windows.

She composes an ode to a city street of shops, a field of sunflowers, the traffic gliding by beyond a car window. Coloured lights and water are so very beautiful, oh yes, yes they are. Coloured lights and water, oh, oh, so very beautiful, she sings, her head bumping against the back seat, a ceremony of movement, a simple melody in honor of a water fountain, illuminated, she believes, by the power of her composition.

\She sings to a sheeted room, its corners muted, its walls opening up to surprises, cubicles of sounds and movement. Hello, cheri, please, hello, let me talk, she sings, sculpting the shape of a woman's desire to know, and to be known. I become a dancer, drawn to circle her white square of sound, to feel the silence emanating from the dangling telephone receivers, feel the spaces between me and others in the room shimmer as the music transcribes our thoughts. You know me well, I am not the sort

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who would ever pretend, she sings, lost to any desire but that of the moment, directed by the language of the country she now inhabits. A receiver crumbles beneath her touch, its flesh-coloured powder staining the front of her white dress. I hear the wind of inner space, the melancholy that visits a room inhabited by waiting.

Candles are lit and extinguished. The sound of a man chopping wood becomes a frame for the acts, the taking out, and putting away of rituals. A dancer unfolds across a space, her each small movement punctuated by a stillness in between. I breath in and out, listen to the silence between the sound of the axe meeting wood, the dancer moving across her space. I remember a summer yard, my child cupping her mouth and singing into the bark of a tree. Oh magic tree, oh magic tree, bring my father home to me. Then twirling, twirling, she goes to sit on the back step and wait. She presses her hands between her knees to prevent the wish from flying away. She inhabits the spaces between words on a page, the lines of a poem, a dancer's movement; she exudes hope, the essence of grace.

\You know me well. I am not the sort who would ever pretend, she sings from her square of light, while a boy slides across the floor on his back to peer at her, his solemn face framed by the legs of a chair. He listens, runs a finger back and forth across a spindle, becomes lost in his thoughts, in creating a line, a hum, a landscape. Our love could conquer every doubt with a tender kiss, or a wild embrace, she sings, as we shift and sigh, and move out from, and into the shadows of the muted corners to view the song, to turn

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away into our thoughts. And then beyond, where the boy lies on the floor, a small girl wanders out onto centre stage. She lifts the hem of her skirt, pirouettes and begins to dance to her own inner music.

La, la, la, a child sings in her crib at night, the young boy thinks as he watches his finger move across the varnished wood, the little girl dances. All of us, performing our invisible ceremonies.

Sandra Birdsell is a wife, mother and grandmother. She is also a daughter, and a sister to four sisters and four brothers. At one time she was a reader of income tax forms, an Avon lady, a sales clerk, a cocktail waitress, communications writer, teacher and seamstress. Although she always wanted to be a dancer, actor and clown, writing became her first love. That was twenty years ago. Since then she has published seven books and received accolades and nominations for awards, and what-not. She has lived most of her years in Manitoba, and for a short time in Prince Edward Island and Ontario. Now she lives in Regina, Saskatchewan. "The further west I come," she says, "the better I feel in my skin." She has given up on various hobbies, such as: sketching, Tai Chi and gourmet cooking. She now concentrates on gardening, vitamins, and being, what her grandson calls, "silly."