

VELVET DRESSES

I want to climb under Dorset's skin
curl up in her folds, wrap her around me
like a patchwork quilt, stained
yet stitched with years of love,
taste the colours of green and gold,
run my fingers over rough textures
of ancient earth.

I want to crawl under her pavements,
her roads, lift great slabs of tarmac,
limb every craggy, awkward hill,
every cliff like a tooth capped with gold;
trek for miles through woods
and green fields like velvet dresses
with skirts fanned out wide;

I want to sink my fingers into the earth
let the tiny stones and grit and bones
run through my hands;
search for the past along with
fossils spiralling to dust
in clay-rich soil.

I want to let Dorset's past soak
like cocoa butter into my skin,
let her history merge with mine:
talk of Africa and her slaves.
I want to know it will be fine
for anyone with not from here
etched like tribal markings into their skin,
to sink into Dorset like a warm rock-pool,
with fingers stretched out towards the sun,
to walk her beaches, green-velvet fields
with pride, say
I live here, belong here, she's mine.

From Salt-sweat and Tears by Louisa Adjoa Parker