prayer beads

quiet as the dawning sky, i sit
anticipating birdsong, unsure about the sun.

this stillness, my pilgrimage.

at memory's pool
i kneel, drink in your visage
mindful not to disturb the surface,
alter the spell with even a ripple of need.

you leave gifts at my door —
bits of song;
slightly faded photographs;
pages torn from an unfinished manuscript;
untitled maps.
i cannot decipher them without you.

i have caught you like rain on my tongue
released you in beads of sweat
returned to the quiet again and again
to light candles, burn sandalwood
remember what i know.

in pools of light i hold your words, a rosary,
feel your desire in the smooth roundness
of each bead, cast prayers of strength,
wait for a sign.

Cheryl Latif

Originally from Southern California, Cheryl Latif emigrated to the Pacific Northwest in 2001 to live under a sky that speaks several languages. Her poetry was first published in Between Sheets, a Cal State Stanislaus literary magazine (1978). Since then, her work has appeared in a variety of local, regional and national publications such as *New Millennium Writings, The Comstock Review, Spillway, How Luminous the Wildflowers, Magee Park Poets* and more, and has been part of several public arts projects. She has also had the pleasure of serving as a judge for local and regional poetry contests. In San Diego, Cheryl curated/hosted a weekly poetry series featuring poets from across the nation and across the pond. The reading became popular enough that more than 100 came to share the magic each week. A copywriter by trade, Cheryl relishes fooling with words.

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