

Donna Baier Stein

LA SECHERESSE

“One woman, one tree.”

Anonymous

When the Sengalese women
tend their communal garden
they water their vegetables
from a hand-dug well,
one bucket at a time.

Their *animatrice* has seven children
but only half a harvest.
As she bends dry dun hands
to cracked ground, the Harmattan wind
peels topsoil and carries
her continent's cast-off skin,
weightless, many kilometers south.

When the women are given buckets
from their leader to water their soil
plant their trees
feed their children
they draw a garden,
full, green and fertile
from the parched earth.

The *animatrice*, blowing life
into her sapped disciples,
reminds them their tribe has a riddle:

*Where does the dry season go in rainy season,
and where does the rainy season go in dry?*

She answers, *Into the acacia tree,
evergreen, with pendulous leaves
and silver wattle.*
*From you, she tells them,
dusting her pinched breasts,
the tree comes; even to him,
our leader, the tree is a riddle.*