

## **Pauline Plummer**

### **1. The Date Palms**

cluster in soft brown sugar sand.  
Their crown of palms rustle like ostrich plumes  
sighing in the desert wind,  
a kaleidoscope of shadow and white light.

In the distance stretch honeyed dunes,  
the shape of huge bodies  
with rippled stretch marks.

Small birds chatter above the knobbly pineapple stems;  
between the frayed, fallen palms,  
tiny claw prints, hoof marks, large paws - a writing I can't read.  
A bee flits between a scatter of white asphodels.

It is too early for date palm white blossom,  
too late for the autumn harvest.  
The February nights are cold.

Gone are their old forests.  
Desert sand ravages the land  
but the Berbers remember their generosity:  
a thousand dates on one bunch:  
leaves for basketry: the sap for drink: the ribs for furniture:  
stalks for fuel: shade in the heat and the taste,  
the taste of sweetness breaking the Ramadan fast.

### **2. The Olive**

First of all trees,  
its seeds carried from the Tree of Knowledge.

Here in the villages, they are  
tenderly nurtured from cuttings.  
Rain gives the slim saplings  
a once a year drenching.

They whisper in shadowed courtyards.  
Sparrows gossip from dawn to dusk  
in the grey-green leaves.

Fallen fruit, black as obsidian,  
bitter as a sharp joke, lie scattered on the sand.

May their roots reach to what water still lies  
deep beneath the dried-up river bed.

May the pressing of their fruit  
bring liquid treasure to the Berbers.

History is written in the hollow, contorted barks  
– the branch brought by the dove to Noah -  
the woven leaves in Pharaoh's crown -  
Jesus in the Mount of Olives.

They ask little of the soil or weather.  
Blessed are the meek.

### **3. The Argan Tree**

Defiant in the scorching wind  
the Argan squats its gnarled body  
spreads its canopy of leathery leaves,  
clenches its fists of fearsome thorns.

They gather in forests  
head to head with Saharan sand,  
a battle line against poverty and hunger.

Their green fruit falls in late summer  
its precious nut inside.  
The women crack the nuts,  
extract the kernel and sit in shade  
to turn the stone that grinds  
out rich red-amber oil – magic, potent,  
an unguent to soften wrinkles  
of the women in the West,  
a medicine for clogged up blood  
and worn out joints.