

IRIS JAMAHL DUNKLE

Earthquake

an erasure of Jack London's The Valley of the Moon (1913), Book 1, Chapter 1

What if the girls and women caused a tremor
—a long shriek—enough to kill. For a time, work
went on and on in the home. Another
week gone fierce up. She walked on through weathered
wood, dust of years, ridged, wide-cracked, uneven.
Until she attempted to tread a day
recklessly; took a mouthful of control
without waiting for the earthquake. She had
crossed the plains in a prairie schooner, in
a bullet-hole, in a small looking-glass.
She had been thrust under young men. She had
sobbed repression, swung noiselessly open,
was startled by her own voice: No, no.
Think of your own precious self—everything
in the world is wrong now. Shut the door.

ABOUT THE POEM & AUTHOR

“Earthquake” was created from *The Valley of the Moon* by Jack London (1913). About the poem and the process of composing it, Iris Jamahl Dunkle writes:

This erasure based on the first chapter of Jack London’s novel *The Valley of the Moon* is an act of recovery and resistance. I’d always admired how Jack London had written such a strong and realistic female character in the early 1900s; the novel has a strong female protagonist who leads her husband on a quest to find a home. However, during my research for writing a biography about Jack London’s wife, Charmian Kittredge London, I found out why the novel depicted women more realistically—quite simply, parts of the novel were written by Charmian. My erasure attempts to write the agency and voice of women back into this text.

Iris Jamahl Dunkle is the author of *Charmian Kittredge London: Trailblazer, Author, Adventurer* (University of Oklahoma Press 2020) and *West : Fire : Archive* (Center for Literary Publishing, Colorado State University 2021). Her work has appeared in *Tin House*, *Pleiades*, *The Los Angeles Review*, *Poem-a-Day*, *Green Mountain Review*, and elsewhere. She is the poetry and translation director at the Napa Valley Writers Conference. She lives in northern California and can be found online at irisjamahldunkle.com.

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