

IMMIGRANT

poems by
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I

The Mouths of the Speechless

Avocado

Wound tight inside the avocado
we once found a perfect copy
of the tree in miniature,
pale, translucent leaves unfurling,
coiled strings of roots, a stem
that split the pit. We didn't have
the heart to toss it out, crowned
with coffee grounds and newspaper.
In the end, the landlady took it
with the rent. She said she'd plant it
among the rocks and jagged shade
against the southern slope for strength
since silky avocado flesh
thrives under adverse conditions.

Falling Fruit

They long to be devoured by a willful traveler
who will rub them soft and let them fall.
They can't wait to go.

They bounce in the beds
of cargo trucks, they crowd the sidewalks, they beat
upon the parking lot and streets.

In the market they call out
the name of their price. They can always
be talked down. They don't care how many
wrinkled bills you press into the hands
of sweaty women. They don't count the coins
nor admire their portraitures.

Sometimes they tear
the shopping bags and dive into the street.

Even
the established walnut tree at the Catholic school in Germany
moans all night. We rip the seeds apart in the morning.
Our fingernails are yellow, our tongues
bitter brown.

At this point Beatriz
pops out the bathroom window. Her hair
is loosened, her shoulders bare
her face is wet. She is smiling shyly.

Like this
she is the flesh a mouth would want to hold.
She offers to open the door for me, a foreigner
who has no key. She must have heard
the wooden door. I hadn't called out.

Her feet
are printing their wet leaves across the floor.

The Ninth Floor in Caracas

In the streets below Draghitza's body
rain baubles the yellowish-brown light—

her body's wet and slick as street
and brown between the window slats—it's rain-

ing and the pipes groan *porque*.

She turns off
the faucet, reaches for the soap, suds

leave her hands and slide the way
stolen bulbs of light slide

(on electrical lines

diverted through the mountainside
barrios, where it also rains,

puddling the floor, baby slapping
water and the hair-line cracks of concrete

like the lines around Draghitza's mouth)

(I pay for my electricity
Franklin says, who lives there).

It's raining

on her bright breasts, it's raining on her belly
down her thighs; the people below are wet

with stolen light.

 No umbrellas
strew their colors —it's too hard

for that—but dogs quiver under lumber
busses splash the same

sloppy syllable across each sidewalk,
the metro opens its mouth, the balcony

becomes a cup.

 The faucet won't turn off. The soap, the soap has
fallen and her body, slick

is shining.

 Draghitza shakes some water
drops from her fingertips, she blurs

in latent steam, is lost in surfeit
sharpened and blurs again.

She has fingerprints and large hands.
She tastes slightly of metal and of sea.

She is always smaller in person
than we expect and more
 than we remember.

The History of the Date

Those aren't wrinkles, merely places where
the skin is burrowing to lick her own
dark sweetness. Since her body's fashioned from
the clay remaining after Adam's spine and hair,
she often yields the fibers of her trees
for baskets, shoes, the rope and needles, thread
her mythic children crafted in their need.
In her youth she tarried near the Euphrates;
Chaldean men en route through Babylon,
Assyrians, caressed and carried her
from one oasis to the next. A year
is worth a date palm, and a month, a frond,
according to the hieroglyphs that suckle
on her absence, spurting syllables.

Jaffa

At the sea we sink our shifting heels
into the sand, examining the seam

where the waves unravel,
where shards of pottery,

shuddered from their historic tables,
sweep themselves along the creaking floor

and tumble to the shore. Once in just this spot
Jonah fell into the belly of a whale.

Who wouldn't like to be the sea sometimes,
it's ambiguous border, its changeful fortresses—

now repelling, now holding close,
slamming the explosive sand

that once joined continents.
This country, for example, breaking

in two. The inhabitants of Jaffa have always hated
what they could not love

and loved what they could not hate.
I'd like to be, just once, a bride,

if only to that old whale,
to set the table with earthenware,

to say something great was holding me here,
this was my provenance—

and someone some day would tell by my shards
where I belonged.

Angels

1.

If the groans and shrieks of martyrs, the shofar cry of Yom Kippur really rend the heavens, then I picture it like this: clouds are ripped as if by swords, and angels spill and spread across the world.

Once a rabbi fled from Poland to the tranquil town of Tzfat, enduring unutterable privations and fear along the way. As the Galilean hills lift and lull his tired feet, an angel infestation fills his red, chapped ears. Their voices chirrup from synagogue

to synagogue, he can almost glimpse their ragged white beneath the turquoise doors, like lice beneath a skirt of lettuce. And so he leaves for Tiberius complaining that the angels had kept him up at night.

2.

My grandparents sheltered their hearty human bonds
in a wood-framed rental with a wrap-around porch.
Each of six dark daughters through the years
reduced the sum of chaos by a suitcase as they left.

Though loathe to do it, grandpa dies and leaves
grandma alone. She says she found angels
skittering across soup plates, wrecking havoc
on the crystal. When asked if she would like

to die and join her true love, my grandmother
replies, not unless he stops arguing
with God in the next room. And how
he loves her still, we thought.

3.

The Antimatter of Angels

Antimatter is not found naturally on Earth, except very briefly in small quantities ... because... when matter and antimatter come into contact they annihilate.

Maybe I'm not hurt enough,
or maybe I'm just standing
on the wrong side of eternity.
My only bloodless visitor
comes when I am all alone.
I hope I never know
if his infinity of *no* can really
blot out God the way
he whispers that it can,
just as his colorless shadow
snuffed the closet light
when I was still a child,
how his unbearable approach
silenced my ears; the world
stopped as the windows quaked
against his fingerless whorl.