

“Northern Spy”

*...Quite susceptible to many of the usual range of diseases, particularly mildew and fireblight.
Northern Spy also takes its time to come into bearing.*

Crack the geode
with your teeth
to swallow honeyed skin
golden jewels spill down your chin
crisp like the first
lie you told
your *abuelita*. You wish
it could no longer hurt
you ignore snow white’s
lore to keep the meat
down. does it taste
as delicious as you remember?
no, you cannot call her
for confirmation but wonder
if apples
break in the same
tradition of homes splitting
open
halved or not
seeds swung from Michigan to Mexico

Recollect the first time *abuelo*
taught you the word *hogar*
—not *casa*
that old english
wooden mystery
placeholder *home* so fire
hazard, so log cabin:
ashes on your tongue
you can spit them out now
you can swallow the arsenic instead

claro que sí you tell your friends
I have a home

the lie means less
once translated
so you can forgive
yourself for what
you do not
say, that home is forgery
signing spanglish more broken than spangled flag
striped stars ripped into
H- O- M- E
forcing your hand over
that bloody beating fruit
the wound you cannot close
flesh made brown only once exposed
hogar carving your heart for a Michigan apple pie
in the house you are not welcome
in the town where your words do not mean

“Measuring Distance”

We drive seventy-five miles in order to scream
me and three locals I nudged
into this ramshackle rental car.
Dangling muffler daring
to snag pavement that tries to kiss it.
These wheels and I do not want to leave the ground:
there is no road-- only a list of what I'm afraid of
a runway built backwards, constructed from fear.

Never mind the wings I borrowed to get here
over an ocean,
the better half of a continent
that bore me;
closing my eyes on every flight
begging hands
to forget the worry
I'd inadvertently slipped into my carry-on
baggage can be such a--
Slight right onto Hawaii belt road.

Learning to maneuver what once was
boiling red
landscape burns my retinas
as if nervous earth has been sucking its own thumb
to swollen pink prune.
Basalt rusting in the heavy heat
oxidation getting the better
of volcanic rock
what does not wilt to crimson
stays black and tortured, magma-made ridges
turn to biting their own nails
leaving some hanging, dangling
threatening to tear tires and poorly-laid plans.
I cannot help

thinking all destinations will demand
I first go through hell.

When we arrive at the cliffs,
the real distance
has not been closed
apprehension a stowaway devil clinging to my swimsuit;
clinging to the edge.

Don't look down,
Danny, spitting
image of the sun,
tired of witnessing masses
watch their feet trudge,
says to stare skyward
instead. But I can't
help it
allow my eyes to swallow
what would (dare I say will?) torture my throat
when surrounded
by what will not
quench thirst.

We drive seventy-five miles in order to taste faith
all the way down
fire in the fall. One way
or another I know my bones
will hit the waves.

“Under the covers”

The sheet my daughter called the sky
can't stop collecting holes.

She steers my eyes sore pointing at her find.
Sure enough, the stars are up there:
keyholes I had not noticed,
fissured doors I do not want her to knock on.
Never thought I would instruct her to look at her feet
or cover her eyes to curb curiosity.
But my baby's innocent fixation has me shuddering:
what other things are like things?

I am not prepared
to explain away
why God is,
or is not,
in the flowerpots.
Heaven forbid—
if there are ghosts among grandma's chrysanthemums.

And if the sky has been punctured in multiple places,
someone ought to piece it back together.

She has yet to request it,
but I will be ill-equipped
by the time she wants my hands
to sew these tatters.
She did not ask
what happens when separate tears converge—
still,
I've started craning my neck to catch
creases before they crack,
hoping my spine will be first to bend.

Perhaps the stars will grant me grace,
and a long ladder,
and the bravery to best gravity.
Since comets are so commonplace;
with them:
wishes for us fools,
billowed by belief,

building flimsy forts for children to play beneath.

Yet, when we laid on our backs
in mossy beds I made for us both
I stopped wondering if
the blanket will fall.
Decided it's a matter of when;
quit worrying
if the apocalypse will smother us tomorrow or yesterday.
Or if I will ever tuck her in again.

The earth will hold my daughter whole,
warm as one of her own.

“Down Here”

Down here, the moon is the only man who holds me cheek to cheek.
Down here, I look up there, to witness our makeshift waltz in your kitchen.

Down here,
you are pacing my circumference,
in between the stove and the refrigerator
absentmindedly circling me;
accidentally rendering me the sun.
I am spinning to hold you in my gaze.
Our radius is an arm's length away, but I will not move
until I've decided who is orbiting whom—
if I'm caught in your gravity,
or you, in mine.
Until I've decided if this is what I've been looking for.

Because we are all looking for something,
for someone
as wide as what the telescopes we hide behind our eyelids stare at—
all night long.
We are all combing the skies for that first star,
if only out of habit,
the kind that follows us from childhood;
a small girl trailing my thoughts with two braids
and a gap between her front teeth that I could hide inside.

Or so I hypothesize,
arbitrarily connecting the points
between then,
and now.
Playing at constellations,
timelines I have yet to classify as biography or fiction--
not that history can even tell the difference
besides the present, beside your pulling presence.

And we still say we see stars whenever we spin too fast,
down here.
Where we lie on our backs
to reach something like heaven.

Down here, you pace planetary ellipses around me in your kitchen,
down here we play house, make pretend, role-play planets in love with a star.
One of these is true.

“Women are told what to do with their mouths”

Women are told what to do with their mouths,
When and where to swallow
From birth, we learn to open wide
Spooned milky submission, and force-fed silence
Until our tongues turn heavy utensils we do not know how to use

Women are told what to do with their mouths,
I have learned to talk so calmly
dress diatribes in casual skinny jeans,
slide feelings into stilettos, careful though— not too tall, I cannot risk towering over them
The men that are heard in ripped t-shirts, while I mascara every message
cover the contents in Cleopatra eyeliner
To code what’s forbidden so that true thoughts are hidden,
The off-limits vocabulary reserved for anger, for fury; for men
Because they perceive raised voices as raised fists

Women are told what to do with their mouths,
There are phrases here I did not commit to memory,
Yet my mouth is so good at apologies
My lips more adept at accepting blame, than credit
They change shade more often than shape
Red to seduce, nude to disappear, pink to massage his ego, all equally skilled in the art of “I’m sorry”
My throat is so full of “I’m sorry”’s sometimes I choke on them

Women are told what to do with their mouths,
How to please a man with parted lips,
A heart-shaped hole to blow a kiss,
I remember learning how to moan
I never realized they were costuming us as ghosts
Entombed in our own “oh”’s
Never noticed we were making the same noises assigned to the dead
Until it was too late
We should all know the sounds of the spaces between

Sighs and screams
Moans and murders

Women are told what to do with their mouths,
As if we did not know how they work,
As if sooner or later we won't need them at all

It is no coincidence that we are taught to keep quiet, keep mouths shut, keep ourselves small
No coincidence that the orifice for consumption and creation are the same
Not when we've become so good at closing our own traps,
Pruning this rose of a weapon into a closed bud, clipped of its thorns

But, women:

The next time they alert you to the lipstick on your teeth, say its the blood of your enemies, the
blood of tyrants
Remember you know what to do with this mouth
You were born to swallow the sky and sing it back out