

“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