

Khaki & Black

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I wake to a dental hygienist
standing on my bed
changing a seashell lightbulb.

triple-distilled blanco tequila
amateur hour at the comedy club—
open mic'd it myself: "I'm on vacation!"

But she is wearing hospitality
khaki and black,
so I know, she is just a maid.
(sorry for saying "just" — am I excusably woozy?)

The water is soft here
and my hair so greasy; not promised "beach hair"—
unnaturally slick and unfamiliar:
a foreigner's head.

She sees me stir, the hygienist-maid
and panics, hopping off my bed
jostling my American body
and hat-dancing out of room 204,
where I paid extra for the view.

Outside my window
free jungle birds sound like playground toys
and the caged keel-billed toucan,
the check-in attraction,
preens for the day's arrivals.

The Expensive Bus

The Sign
bolted to the slimy cave floor
reads: "Caution! Tourism! Slipping when wet!"

We are laughs and shivers in the cenotes
floating under the dripping ceiling
thinking of summer lakes back home,
Above Ground.

My hair
still drying
as I watch waitresses
dance and clap,
spinning trays of food
on their heads,
sweat painting their brown cleavage clear.

Peacocks trill over marble tiles.
Dahlias hug the restaurant.

On the way over:
cinderblock homes and scavenger dogs,
two miles from a World Heritage Site.

At the soaring pyramids,
surreally intact and designed,
Mayan children slither from edge-trees,
handing us doilies and sewn rags, asking for pesos,
before cultural handlers
push them back.

I try to follow the children
into the skinny gray Yucatán trees,
but a man's hand comes down on my shoulder.
"Jaguares," his black tongue rolls.

On the return charter bus
a romantic comedy plays:
Drew Barrymore with subtitles
as we roll past armed checkpoints
in the inky Mexican countryside.

The Free Bus

“Leaves at six,”
he says, “But it’s not for, you know: *you.*”

I sit among the khaki and black
on their ride
(resort provided)
heading east.

They are round sleepers,
the worn women,
chin-down in Aztec feathers
like ethnic Big Birds.

I am the only gringa
but no one looks;
we listen to a cabana boy
play his five-string,
singing about coffee beans
and a lover named Mary.

Dirty smocks and hairnets meet on the seats
while I watch the streets turn to charcoal:
porous and crumbling in the developments.

Pick-up fútbol and strollers,
smoking grills, fiery carnitas.
Four siblings to a bedroom:
I see their wobbly heads,
marionettes on plastic blinds.

I’m the only one making the return trip
to the tourist strip. The driver wordless,
me in a white sundress,
foolish.

I leave
the bus blowing between mangroves
while I walk down the hotel’s driveway.
Back to room 204,
where I paid extra for the view.

Peacekeepers

I'm chewing on sunglasses
when a tank rolls through Cancún.

The gunner,
bronzed and squinty,
spits homemade tobacco on the asphalt as
a woman grabs my wrist.

"What happened?" she breathes,
clutching her unstamped postcards,
waiting for the light.

"Peacekeepers," I say.

"*The drugs,*" she knows.

The muzzle swats palm fronds
and caterpillar tracks click forward.

The tank roars like a rebuilt muscle car.
Maybe an American: a Mustang, a Charger,
a new model, built after our war,
moving away
from this homesickness.

I sip my yard-drink
watching for doves
waiting for the light

As I Leave the Four-Star Resort

A pirate party ship
anchors in the Gulf of Mexico.

I hear the floating disco
from the shore,
where I sit un-drinked
watching smudgy fishermen
catch foreign suppers of a tropical stripe.

No tan, no man,
just the edge-tree children,
and the khaki and blacks,
repacking the suitcase of my brain.

I roll a wooden Mayan mask
stained brown and ivory
in a t-shirt for carry-on.
Didn't know how to barter:
should have bought a sombrero,
colored red, white,
and green; though new life
is buried in Mexico.

I am turquoise and strangeness,
taking a tank of a taxi
then an airplane
to my lake home,
above ground.

I cut papaya for lunch:
grown in Mexico but served to me.