

“for the nights when the moon won’t kiss your teeth”

in the ninth grade, they taught everyone CPR
but I never paid the five dollars for the certificate
because I didn’t believe I was worthy
of the permission to save someone’s life:

see, they never teach you to carry toothpaste on you
for you to paint the neighbor living down the street from you,
so you can heal all her burns
after some asshole spelt the word dyke
in used condoms on her driveway.

nor do they tell you to keep a thermos of agua panela on you
so that when you see your lab partner’s purple
bleeding through concealer at the edge of her chin
you can pour her a beaker full of warmth and sweetness
so she understands that love is not four pm drunken punches.

they don’t tell you to keep a spare wheel on you
when roaming through congested hallways
so you can hand it to the boy emptying his locker,
because he doesn’t want his mother to sort through his belongings
after finding him on his bedroom floor
with his father’s shotgun beside him,
because maybe that spare wheel will remind him
that there is a day trip worth tagging along,
even if you’re simply hanging from the back.

I’d never let my lungs fill someone else’s
because I’m afraid I’ll do it backwards:
wanting to swallow all their hurt
that blinded them unconscious,
and then accidentally take too much.

I’ve always fumbled in the art of saving someone’s life
because no one is packaged with a manufacturer’s manual.

july won’t fit in any first aid kit,
otherwise we’d all know to pull out the fireworks from the fourth.
maybe tonight the moon doesn’t want to kiss your teeth,
and maybe he won’t let the stars tickle you behind your ear,
but the millions of us who see you
want to show you how we’ve self-medicated all these years:
by throwing our sorrows into the sky,
screaming as they go,

letting everything that's inhibited us spark,
and sprinkle into smoke.

“the mediterranean is a cemetery”

let me make a home in you,
oh, please let me make a home in you.

this, this is what they ask of us.
salt in the wound—broken hearts, broken bones.
arms grow tired from folding souls,
carrying them everywhere they go
like papers in back pockets, now weathered.
history a compass reminding them
why they stain their skin with dust and water
over and over again.

clothes washed up the turkish shoreline, empty.
bodies without homes, we let the tide carry our children.
but ships get heavy with all these gone-to-soon goodbyes,
goodbye to the ‘I love you’s
the ones he spoke every day to,
now he’s gone walking to a lost home to
bury the boy the world woke up to.

seventy one bodies without breath.
no body belongs in a box.
seventy one in a truck met death.
baby’s heart dead beat, another loss
before even learning to speak.
no place to breathe when stuck.
living on lines of borders, the in between.
paper countries leaving paper cuts.

five hundred water filled lungs.
five hundred sinking. sinking. sinking.
two hundred voices in the sea, unsung
one hundred ninety eight lucky for a saving.
these dead bodies are on the shoulders of man.
more are left to wade in the fading away.
dust to dust, more like dust into sand.
sunk to the bottom where the seaweed sways.

the mediterranean is a cemetery.
there is no refuge in the sea.

with open arms, go and greet
welcome the hungry, the tired.
the ones who only have their feet.

let them build a home in you, let them in.

citizens of the world, coming from the same earth and stars.
humanity brushed onto the shore, and we are all responsible.

“I am the daughter of an illegal immigrant”

I am the daughter of a man and a woman
who could not find the word home
in crumbling houses weighed down by their history.

This I've never told
except to the one friend who asked me,
“why didn't she come the right way?”

him being from Syria, I thought he'd understand:

the right way.
the right way takes connections no one wants to make.
selling yourself to the politicians who will not defend you.
who do not see the family living in a home smaller than their bathroom,
who do not see the child making the decision
between studying evolutionary biology
or an eye surgery that will save them from not seeing,
who do not hear the voices of their people.

the right way takes money nobody has.
it would take a year without expenses to find the way for
passports, visas, and processing fees.
a year of work without home, without food, without comfort
just to fill out the papers.
a days worth of work, just for the bus ticket to the capital.

the right way takes ten years of waiting.
a period of time long enough for a child of the world
fascinated by how tall the trees are and how sweet mangos taste in july
to the twenty one year old
who learned that the trees she fell in love with as a child
can see more of the world than she ever will,
how no matter the number of mangos on the kitchen counter
nothing will taste as sweet as how she once thought she was invincible.

this friend of mine comes from a world of privilege,
where privilege is known to few.
where there was always hot tea ready on the dining room table
and always somewhere to go on the weekends
no one he knew could cook, but there was always more than enough to eat.

I told him,
your father is a business man who knew a man who knew a man.
the seven thousand dollars it took you to get here

did not require the breaking of coin jars.
you got here by plane years before everyone else started walking,
but there are those who only have their feet.

my mother walked from colombia to houston, texas
in her sister's shoes that she taped together.
she did this alone, carrying nothing but a folded paper with an address in blue ink.

I am the daughter of an illegal immigrant.
I am the daughter of a warrior.