

*Four Poems*

On a Gray Day, Burning

The man who is to be my husband  
lays each slip of paper,  
each shred of old cloth  
over the flames.

He is burning  
the leftovers  
of his last home,  
burning the longing  
for a gentle life lived  
among the lakes and hills.

Everything lights swiftly.

Some singed sheets lift, dusty black  
moth wings scattering  
over tall grass,  
grass a deep green from tropical rains.

I tell him that today  
feels like autumn in the north:  
smell of smoke, soggy air breeze-  
dried. He nods, shifts  
away from the flames,  
listens to his own  
memory: a whiff  
of ash and smolder  
from his firm-fisted mother's  
wood-burning stove,  
the taste of simmering  
beans and barbeque.

Or,  
perhaps,  
as the cinders settle,  
he is listening  
to some future self whisper  
tomorrow's memories  
of today.

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## A Word or Two

A word or two  
is spoken,  
small words,  
simple sounds, really  
nothing but vibrations,  
though some  
seem to come from the belly  
of the earth, they are  
the rumble  
that erupts volcanoes,  
the wind  
that slams doors or  
the air  
that stales  
bread overnight,  
quiet crust,  
a breathing-out  
to turn windmills  
on the hill,

a whisper to sink ships.

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## Charm

I'm a snake charmer,  
brain-washer with a smile,  
can't make tortillas but I flatten  
his body against mine  
fiercely  
nightly

in the blue house.

Enemy,  
they see in my few  
blond strands blowing or the color  
of skin with freckles.  
They stare,  
examine,  
imagine  
my belly, my legs stealing  
their man  
like the ants that dismantle  
the dying moth;

they must have learned  
it in grammar school, how to  
perfectly shape,  
decorate,  
speak  
quiet scandal.

In the dolphin-blue house I am not

Enemy  
but still—  
a curious eye  
watches:  
Yes,  
white hairs grow out of  
my arms,  
toes, legs—but  
I groom to please.  
It's those black  
hairs in my armpits—  
when my slang  
doesn't shock anymore,  
I'll show you those.  
Crazy gringa,  
you'll say then, while  
resistance leaks out  
of the holes  
in my back.

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## Wife Found Surviving Under Umbrella

Under it, she crouches  
while she shuffles  
around the living room.  
It helps outside  
when she walks to the store  
and it rains. She likes it then.  
But otherwise,  
most other times,  
the dull red  
that is dusty now, and grimy  
on the edges  
from bacon splatters  
and flour dust  
makes her sad.  
It bulges in places,  
and the spokes poke  
people on the street.  
She has to be careful  
not to knock down  
pictures from the wall.  
It really is too much now,  
a reddish hindrance.  
“But, truly, many days  
it rains on the way to market,”  
she says.