Europe, too, Came from Somewhere Else -- To America

I. Zeus, What Have You Wrought?

Columbus says he's ours. You've got to go back to that first push,

he says,

I'm not responsible!
he says

you

committed the first crime.

Cortez swears he's

not the one.

His soul weighs heavy on our son's mind.
What to do?
How to judge?
Not the one set

destiny

in motion.

Custer died doing what he had to do, clear a path for

manifest destiny,

your project,

says

this land

always thrives on blood passes

responsibility

back

to you.

Rita Hayworth says she's not responsible, had her Indio teeth knocked

out,

her Indio hair bleached

white,

her image projected onto our orphaned princess, made fertile for our

utopian dreams.

Don't walk away now:

We spawned them all and I, Am I responsible

for your theft?

And perhaps it's true what they say about the children of rape, perhaps the violence of our children spilled out from that first

passion

between us,
in those first times

with continents

young enough to be named, an island to run to, a new world to be made.

II. Between Homes

You sit facing me and as we fall

back

into English,

and very good English at that, the others in the cafe know You're not Mexican!
In spite of your dark skin.

You told your father
Your friends told their fathers:
 "I am Indio"
Your fathers are proud of their Spanish blood.

With $Bodas\ de\ Sangre\ so\ full\ of\ handsome\ Spaniards,$ I try to think of what Spain has given you

besides

devoted mothers and hushed whispers as your sisters discuss the cute little bastards they see on the down low.

Ana-Maria speaks up in the back of my head: "We're all the bastards of the Spanish, all of us with Spanish surnames."

She tried to think of Indio surnames.

"I am Indio!"
Your skin peels today, but it doesn't hurt.

Only Spanish skin burns.

And I remember Indian women silently serving their men and I wonder how my taste for handsome Spaniards is culturally determined.

They fought for seven hundred years before they came over started your fight for a name, your women dyeing their hair the color of maize.

In Spain the Revolution killed her newlyweds, and the dead were left to bury their dead. When Marti failed here, Spain's bastards

turned

on each other leaving your Indio grandparents burying their woven language.

You speak only Spanish, and of course English, like every Pocho hustling Chicano pride in Mexican streets.

It's your turn Herbert:
 Go to Spain
 Tell her:
 I am your bastard.
 Now is the time for Spain

to listen

to her bastards.

You are Indio but you cannot throw away that part of you which needs you most.

III. Guanajuato

Have I made you my tour guide? You're new to the city yourself wandering through the streets. A picturesque maze, one cannot get lost, the city's too small.

This is the time of mixed messages, the article I read asks feminists to draw the line.

Here, together, we sip coffee and dissolving lines begin to touch as we become better acquainted.

Children look up stop playing long enough to guide you. Their grandparents turn to tell us you're on the wrong track.

My handsome guide, towards the evening, tired, legs hurting, we sit down, discuss your future, mine and subtly the present.

We speak of sisters, yours, the nineteen kids your mother bore like a good Catholic. She still takes the girls to Mass, and you tell me, it's their business. Standing in the torch of the Pipilo we find the time of mixed messages. You say we should go dancing, it's good for the soul, a little harmless fun before Sunday. We look down into the city as we walk

to the sky, booby-trapped sentences tearing at the fabric of smiling tourist interest.

I should not lose you in this maze. And yet I want you to taste some of my life in this world so familiarly yours.

IV. B.C. - D.F. -- Visiting Friends in Mexico City

You come for the late-comer, punctually whisk me away into a city in the midst of daily re-definition and joke about the Plague God decided to hand your land. Her People.

They say the world grew jealous of Mexico, God had to even out the score, and he's working at it, still, my train was late, my glasses got stolen, your car was robbed last month.

We chat in French,
the day after you tell me
your English sister-in-law
doesn't know what she's talking about,
complaining daily about her
underdeveloped life, saying
you're partial.

Your sister-in-law may not believe in God, but she agrees with him:
Everything would be perfect in Mexico without Mexicans, there'd be a plan for the traffic, air, water, enough, perhaps, for another green Jerusalem.

To me you explain: "Oui, c'est vrai, je me vois Mexicaine!" So we compare beauty, culture, your proud past, I tell you about Indios and you glance at your maid pouring dark coffee into our cups, ask: "Tu trouve ca beau?"

A child still I heard about the perfection of Moussolini's trains, how for once, they ran on time, no thieves snatching purses from unlucky tourists, how there was order alongside the terror.

Here I suppose you got a raw deal:
Your car disappeared
with the same ease
as the ninety-thousand Americans
that stood in the way
of a safe America.
And picking your way through
the various factions of the North,
you can only fall back on yourselves,
a people cursed to soothe
our jealous world.

V. One month after arrival -- To Zeus

1.

I was five years old when we reached Crete. Our island paradise had no electricity. In the center of the petrol lamp a flame rose each night, fragile, hot, sometimes it would break the glass.

One month after arriving I could almost make my way to the center of town. It's easy, really, to sleep at different times Everything is so tiring.

Every day, spring showers hone the roads, marigolds brush against the mud It is a green country in October.

In April the meadows came alive. From your cave, from snow-glazed mountains giving birth to a sea of poppies you'd come to distend the wool that kept me warm Replace it with your hands your breath a white cloud hanging over the White Mountains south of Chania.

A strange fall lures me into a sandy grove the heat is thick with papayas hanging like green pumpkins from patches in the sky.

Cloudy-white waves splash my legs drag rives of mud beneath my feet enclose my body as I float out to sea.

Once you know the point at which a wave breaks, you dive for its center feel its power graze your feet.

Two months after arriving fevered memories mix little differences the houses all remind me of each other black grids grip glass my aching feet cool the red tiles

climb the wall I

press my head against the white stucco crossed by a thousand fissures skein catching me as I fall

silent.

Warmed by desert winds the island yields its fruit, my lover's eyes gaze over the shape of the future judge, and drying, Crete begins to sing.

I don't know
where these crickets hide
they fill each
night with memories I
cannot tell
which will be more important
cannot judge yet,
One month later,
when the mangoes in the garden
ripen.

They get stolen,
like the peaches
barely yielding to our mouths
ripped from the trees
I found one half-eaten
in the piles of rotting leaves,
Green and foreign like all
this land, this city touching,
encircling me.

You have filled my life with new doubt. This new love the fates offer me his green tongue opening my lips, unravels my desire.

Tropical light splashes

over

the window sill, summer thunder opens

my new chapter, and I am reminded I have come here too much a stranger to take my old place.

I slide

my fingers through
dried petals of familiar jasmine,
wonder about its journey
from Asia

to Europe

to America,

And step into my new world.

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