

Offering

To Lawson

I will not lie.

It will be cold. It will sting.

There are corners here
and thirst.

The landscape of your birth is dry,
prone to fires and yellowed brush.

But what you need to know is this:

At dusk there is a purplish-blue
covering treetops, filling in
deep pockets between mountains,
in the distance. Some days it will come
all of a sudden, other days
you will wait. It is a feeling. It is
what the world offers you-
a full stomach, the coming of a chilly
night, the moment when you have done
all that you will do
for now, right before
the world remakes itself
again and again.

Once

I.

Once, my mother was crying
said to me, let's run away, something
burning in the kitchen. Even then
I knew to be afraid, that house
full of corners, fears that were
or were not, spread, made things
disappear: the baby grand, the yellow
telephone, my father's
clothes. I prepared for us
to run: learned to read a clock
braid my hair, eat spiders
from their webs. Still, I climbed
the black cast-iron stairwell just
to look down and feel. Even then
I knew to count the born and the un-
born, brothers and sisters and fathers and cats.

II.

Once, I made carrot cake for a man
who hit me, or wanted to, or couldn't
help but want an American dessert-
something sweet, with frosting for the guests
to see. Underneath the table, he held my hand
tight, laughed *eres mi postre, mi vida, mia
por siempre*. No way for him to know
I called my mother from the thin white kitchen
while he slept, that I cried, a girl who does not know
the metric system, such cold, how
do I make this work? She mentions lemon rinds,
says I will know what to do and when.

III.

Once, a ceremonial robe
hung from the frame of a door.
The color drained into dawn, specks
of cloth catching reflections of glass
from around the room- mirror and
table and vase. I could not see the top,
thought-a body must be inside-
as I stood not wanting to look,
in this house, where terrible
things happened, where the blood
of a goat could not make things right,
where I had decided to leave
for good but could not
move. Not until music
from the neighborhood mosque
cracked the air wide-
a man chanting in another
language, not unlike the song
my mother sang about the cephalopod,
a song I did not understand
but knew all those years.
At first I remembered, then
walked past. A taxi waiting on the other side.

The Container

In the kitchen I twirled while she wrapped
strips of wet gauze around
my naked waist then belly then breasts.
The texture, rough and dripping, hardened
against the skin, all those invisible hairs
pulled tight. For art – this shell – a form
on which she would mold slabs of clay
to bisque in the earth, colors burning through
the shape of my body –now cast
and hanging in her home– caught
then, in its moment, readying itself
as if on the lip of a jar
for what I could not have known would come–
the cutting and the sucking, convulsions,
everywhere, years pouring
out, pools of murk and ore gathering at once.

Ghazal

Listen: I will no longer be your guinea pig
your “how to live here and there” kid, stretched like a guinea worm.

Between basins of bath waters and iced oceans
I dream their depressions: Canary and Cape, and Guinea.

When I wake, I wake twice, ask for air, think, what if
a monarch stopped mid-air, over a child in New Guinea.

If I drank, it would be the clear wine of palm leaves
the stuff Christians drink, in the forests of southern Guinea.

Once drunk, maybe I’d arrive for good, in my mind
or out, a dry land, unchanged, a desert in Haute Guinée.

If you were drunk too, and said, Annie you *are* here,
I would say, listen up: they call me Aïcha in Guinea.

On Auras*

Dear Friend,

The noodles you gave me,
once cooked, fell apart
and I am putting them
back together— jagged corner, wavy
edge, a jigsaw of brown rice lasagna.

Let me explain. Just now I am wanting everything
smooth: fat noodles, sauce, cheese, again,
unbroken. And yet, I am remembering,
bent over a glass casserole dish
in this fog of sun, the universe.

The one that is not smooth, that
comes in a moment before everything else—
wonder and trouble sinking down
the body before it falls. No one
says this but I will: it is a place

to be returned to, like so many,
like the end of the desert in upper
Guinea where I once drank
plastic baggies full of sour milk,
curdled chunks floating on the top.

**Auras, or partial seizures, often precede epileptic seizures and are characterized by specific sensory sensations depending on the part of the brain in which they originate*