

### Chernobyl's Child

after the fallout  
my mother held her bulging body  
thinking of liquid, of life  
thinking Byelorussia herself  
must be a Mother  
white and carrying

Doctor, tell me the shape  
a cloud or a serpent

Now, at our most fertile,  
we meet in city centers  
to exchange angular glances.

Doctor, how long before I know it,  
the hot dust

The counter dials have quieted.  
The needles slowly shift.

Doctor, it can't penetrate  
the soft of a womb

Still, we sense the movement  
of our internal particles.  
We are the progeny with a gift.

Doctor, doctor what if it does?

### Home

I remember the burst of gladioli,  
popping open silently while we move among the furniture,  
arriving in clusters of red in the kitchen, pale pink on the stairs,  
and stalks that stretch up to spear the communal air  
(of fish when we're alone, lavender when guests visit),  
those odd-numbered stalks for the living, upright  
in crystal vases that take up the light and charm it  
to flicker on the walls, little light mirrors that pass in bits  
across my eyelids on afternoons  
when I dream of sleep in moving cars.

Tonight the projector hums,  
blinking colors onto his wall while I whirl his sheets  
around my body, and the memory makes me shift  
into the blanket wrinkles so he has to search,  
arms stretching out to pull me back to the center, to the air  
carrying scent of his books, cologne, a pair of jeans,  
to his laugh and the way he forms "come back" so I know  
I'll never tell of my love affair  
with this place.

### Imitation, after Neruda

I met you on the eve of that long winter.  
You were an abandoned bank and the whole form waiting.  
On your lips the gusts of many nights were battling,  
and the gales of youth paled the scenery of your palms.

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As fixed to my gaze as a swooning branch,  
your dim, tired eyes closed in the gales.  
Tempest of wonder in which my view was fading.  
Savage white of hailstone melting in my palms.

I feel your voice leave and the winter is dead:  
abandoned bank, eye of a storm, and grasp like the sea  
where my blindness was suffocating  
and my quiet promises were settling in the squall.

The frost from my sill. The ice from the shores:  
you are of heather, of fog, of a raging wind!  
Under your lips nightly gusts were battling.  
Angry gales were battering your palms.

**I say “You are tame” and she just goes wild.**

I cannot understand the look of a wild thing,  
the spark of its iris,  
the darting of its hand,  
the way it speaks:

“I am no midnight ripple; the waves  
of La Pedrera are in my mind, I know  
the way bone ought to be  
sculpted in decades of wind,  
the way mine ought to be  
in decades of drift.

I’ve seen the twisting seat of Güell  
bending into my back and found  
the concrete knew the body,  
the tile shards the eye.

What a color smash at midday:  
orange of market jelly (false sheen),  
yellow of bangle,  
slate-blue of eel water,  
like the river I ran to,  
a little girl  
a wave.”

**Frida, a seed on dry land,**

the vines grew out and through  
the folds of your dress. Roots you called it,  
at peace on cracking ground.  
I have one scar, small and white;  
I’ve left blood on asphalt,  
the driest thing I’ve ever felt.  
Dead things should not touch the living.

You lay on the earth feeling well,  
with the leaves,  
warming in your body heat, extending  
where your vessels should be. Doctors  
should prescribe greenery for your pain,  
thick branches woven  
to hold your body together.  
But hospitals are not like this; they are places of paled  
walls and the smell of stripping clean,

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one that annihilates.

I've loved riding on the handlebars of bicycles  
feeling balanced on one thin leg with a defective knee.  
This is the beauty of a broken form:  
instability allows the bend,  
like an eel in a pan ready for the oven. Coiled round and round,  
its sectioned body resting in spirals.  
I could not eat more than a piece;  
a thing so rich in life leaves a strong taste.

We understand life equally Frida.  
Perhaps what you were saying was not personal,  
a statement of national identity, the feeling  
of being rooted in some country. But I see the growing leaves, Frida,  
sprout out of your chest, and it is a delicate thing.

On the way to my grandfather's mountain village,  
the car struggled up the narrow pathways,  
dry bits of stone grinding against tires, clattering against doors.  
He left us in a clearing, my grandmother and his grandchildren,  
to search for the barrel full of clothes and painted dolls  
that slid away from its straps  
and down the angled land.

My grandmother fed us strawberries on the climb  
and when it got hot she picked the large leaves  
leaning towards us on the road. My grandfather returned,  
barely recognizing the three forms of moving greenery,  
children with leaves sheltering their heads.