POETRY

Wallflowers Are Black

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"The Process of Creation" by Atzin Garcia

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I am not the same woman you left.
That woman was chinaware, pottery-work.
I have nothing to do with things that break.
My mother gave birth
to a huddle of land and flesh
instead of a daughter.
I have soil clotting beneath my skin, saltwater
wrinkling my memory
doesn't it astonish you, that even my heart
is just an anagram
of earth?

My mouth is piled with the jetsam of my Arabic.
I am only fluent in brokenness.
I wad my accent with pledget,
spin my tongue like a sling
around my dislocated language:
The strained "????? ???,"[a]
the sprained "????,"[b]
the fractured "?????? ?????."[c]
Instead, I bedizen my mouth
with the borrowed finery of English:
The synthetic "I'm fine,"
the scantily-clad "Thank you,"
the gaudy "Hi there!"
English sprawls bottomless on my lips;
the syllables squirm with shame.
You say a word and suddenly
it takes up three-quarters of your jaw.
You say a word and suddenly
you belong to it
like an arranged marriage
to a language you agree to love
but never get to know.
What else is there to say about this language
except it is target-practice for the tongue?
Anything is yours

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if it breaks you,
or you break it,
or allow the crossfire to break you both.

Perhaps, home is just another way of saying “??? ???,”[d]
and I am running out of ways to forgive it.
In my mouth, home is just as loud as a curse-word
and just as improper.
This is, I assume, the price we pay for kissing wars goodnight,
for waking up next to past traumas
curled up on our favourite side of the bed.
Home will teach you a thousand ways to die
but none to live.
Now, would you believe me if I said
an anthem could easily pass
for a suicide-note?

My back is freckled with cremains,
gnarled with history.
I traced out the route back home
on the atlas of my body
I am not the same woman you left.
That woman wore her veins like floral brocade,
her body too dainty
to pack on the extra pounds of a country.
I have nothing to do with things
that do not expand into waves or storm clouds.
You should know by now
I am, in all equations, a miscalculation,
in all conversations, a punchline,
my skin a peeled apple
left out in the open air,
my hair a neglected garden,
my name a sigh.
That woman you left did not have
shame for skin,
anger for hair,
a dirge for a name.

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I have nothing to do with things
that do not make a revolution out of me.
Just by the color of my skin,
I can start riots, wars, massacres.
That other woman had skin so bland
it couldn't even start a fist-fight.

I am not the same woman you left.
That woman sold love to passers-by.
I sold my legs
and crawled to a country
that would let me do anything except stand
on my feet.
Long before I learnt I was a loaded rifle,
this country had its index finger on the trigger.
When I starved,
I gobbled the rubble from home.
A map was all I had for a sleeping bag.
I am still learning
to survive my own skin.

For almost nine months,
I was my father's punchbag.
He practiced night and day, day and night.
When my mother birthed me,
I had more thumps than flesh,
more *blue* than bone.
It is no wonder, a man with a clenched fist in my face
is still my last worry.
It is no wonder, I fist-bump tragedy,
greet death with a high-five.
This suicide practice, this exercise
in asphyxiation:
Your rites of passage into a land
that has no interest in you
unless you’re dead.
That woman you left
cried every time she broke a nail

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or lost a few hair strands.
I've lost everything that never grows back:
My house,
my husband and four children,
my mind, my mind, my mind.
I have nothing to do with things
that can be recovered.
The only reason I've never let out a cry
is I had no other choice
but to become one.

I am not the same woman you left.
That woman died long before you parted with her.
I am too much land,
too much water
to know anything about death.
I have my mother's pain in my cells
and my father's fists to fight it away.
I have nothing to do with the woman you left.
My darkness tells a story
her skin can never write.
You should know by now
we sucked red milk from our mothers' breasts,
shaved off our dreams
long before we were old enough to grow them,
festooned our homes with corpses,
bartered our darkness, thickness, heaviness
for a language that sits on the tongue
like a chalk-stone —
To break it
was the only way we could speak it.
You should know by now
we wore helmets to bed,
lifejackets on land,
but when we hit the water,
the only thing we had on our skin
was *black* —

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Even when life tried to stunt us,
we stretched like plants on a wall.
At least, when they wilt away,
they will still be
vertical.[e]

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[a] Translates from Arabic to “Praise be to God.”

[b] Translates from Arabic to “Thanks” or “Thank you.”

[c] A Muslim greeting expression which translates to “Peace be upon you.”

[d] Translates from Arabic to “I am sorry."

[e] Contrary to regular plants which droop and bend down once withered, a climbing plant retains its upright posture even when it wilts, and therein lies the ultimate meaning of resistance.

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