



poems to carry
in your pocket

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A kiss on the forehead—erases memory
—Marina Tsvetaeva

once upon a time i looked through the salt window of a sandcastle
& a portal opened i promised myself never to look into the past
but on perfect summer days i get anxious i want to begin again
once upon a time before the invention of memory no one suffered
when the rain comes down hard i hear the swell of my ocean rising
i'm wary of landlocked places no one can hear you call out for help
in another telling of my story i'm pregnant married to my captor &
my bruises yellow (if you must please whisper this version
i'm already dead & have been since the shotgun was turned on me)
once upon a time i decided love was too much like drowning
made myself an island where if i scream out the ocean swallows
entire cities until i see my suffering is small enough to cradle
before miracles went extinct i found joy in sandcastles
or the impermanence of their precarious building i looked through
a window & there you were on your own island out at sea waiting

born perpetually shy an egg held in my mouth without breaking
i grow more quiet in conflict like sunflowers i'm pattern seeking
even they keep track of time even they are mistaken as a whole
but they contain assemblies of small brown blossoms at their center
you worry dear one that someday i will be terracotta shattering
we both mistake solitude for safety find comfort in wishing
ourselves untouchable you a cloud & i fog daily i remind myself
every life must be s e e d e d with fingerprints
i say a prayer to an unnameable god the constant motion rotating
constellations across a sky that will always be my favorite blue
the cactus that has & will continue to bloom every spring of my life
& hope it's enough to find you whistling a song only birds sing
in morning's memory waiting for me to be present in our living

far off wind chimes get caught tangled on an unceasing wind like
clothes hanging on the line my thoughts nestle themselves
in your collarbone the rain falls marbles on a timpani
you're still sleeping undisturbed like a small animal you are lost
in the unraveled landscape of sleep that should not include me
but i wonder if it looks like your home in the mountains fringed
by ice plants a few fruit trees trimmed down to their trunks
where the rain is too shy to touch the earth's face &
hummingbirds build their nests in the creases of your eyelids
i summon the soft texture of love from absence's mouth
leaning into the sickle moon's quiet body your warm breath close
before i fall away from you into my own unknowable place

dear one midweek is a magic trick you're not here & then
you are a puzzle box in my mind that i can't open so i reveal
my secrets i'm moody until the rain comes down heavy
my first desire was to disappear into the fields one night
when the moon became swollen bursting like a peach i wait
for the world to pick a card i never guess right
why should i when they're tarot & my future never unfolds
itself before it's in front of me like a mirror reflecting
everything that stalks me dogged & hungry from my past

on survival i know only this when land is inhospitable
you must uproot entirely tumble until you find better
land to put down roots listen this part is important
you must never let yourself try & find the first place
you took root you must live like a tumbleweed
you must never call out into the desert blue night
but you will anyways i know this you'll cry out
as the coyotes do weep like cacti beg the wind to
take you back & you'll survive when no answer comes

blue as nausea the sky circling a billowing starlight like a Spindle-
top gusher i am oil slick raven thread rigging across my heart your name
ricocheted by my home across the oil fields dear one please still
the dizziness living separate & together orbits around fear & desire
tidal wave out my mouth only an iridescent black cloud on water remains

jealousy rakes through my stomach
i want my body to churn rot into
blossom so the bitter acid won't
continue gnawing my self-doubt
you look at me like i'm deserving
of real care & devotion, the kind
i've given but never seen up close
until you i didn't know how
to hold a miracle i often think
i need to make my needs small
enough they hide under my giving
my closed mouth fills with soil
when i push away care i choke
on roots sweet as anise or grief
i envy anyone who accepts love
without practice my mouth opens
most often to let out humid silence
fear of loss worries at the hem
of my heart i hear it hum soft

still

once upon a time no one ever had to leave
the world was as reckless as a dandelion
i wrote stories that swaddled me i felt safe
in those years everything was beautiful
enough to leave me in ruins then you arrived
& left without really leaving i felt collapse
before a star's birth in your absence
i imagined myself

in microgravity i worry about the invisible
string tethering me to a future point afraid of
what waits for me but i'm done pretending
this or any story doesn't end inside sorrow
& love or that i'll ever be prepared for both

d i t i n g

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About the Author

Laura Villareal earned her MFA from Rutgers University-Newark. Her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Palette Poetry*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Waxwing*, and elsewhere. She has received scholarships Key West Literary Seminar and The Highlights Foundation. More of her writing can be found at: www.lauravillareal.com

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