

Self-Portrait with Monk

A bearded bride in black chiffon, lei of garlic dandling
his neck like the pearl ballroom choker of God,
he prances across the cobbled path, pushing a wheelbarrow
stacked with freshly scissored lovage and marigold.

I've been spying all morning from the terrace suspended
mid-wall and when, halfway across the courtyard, my monk lifts
his head, I abandon Eco's *The Name of the Rose* and bend
over the rail to flip a ladybug, sure he'll notice my silky mane.
He doesn't, so I trail through the oak door into the dining hall
to watch him arrange sunheads and mauve field tulips in clay pots.

I have already retraced the salty route of his fingers on the spines
of pickled grape leaves, in ground lamb hand-rolled in herbs sun-dried.
He cooks and feeds and scrubs but never eats, my monk,
spends lunch elbow-deep in suds or scratching the bellies of cats.

No wonder he's so famished by the time Cassiopeia arrives.
Then black chiffon and ivory flesh stream upward,
shape-shifting in flight: raven, whiskered bat, pricolici, vârcolaci.
At dawn, he lands between two rose bushes, soot in his mouth,
weeping who knows why, my celestial monk,
torn cassock glistening with spent saliva, rapture in upturned eyes.

You Ask Why I Buy Pineapples and Let Them Go to Waste

Eastern Bloc, 1980s

This is *that* pineapple, Western in beauty,
hard as the country it rode in the belching Dacia,
cozied in hand-me-downs impudent in their brightness.
When they knelt in the German ditch, a mile
before the border to the East, my parents wanted to forgive,
the way they'd forgiven themselves, the decision settled like coffee dregs
heavy with future. Defect, save & send, in time sneak in the children.
Drive on, unthink the West, unthink *dor*, bring home the pineapple.
I imagine them there, in the shadow of words,
fingers curled tight into each other's palms, bare feet
rooting the muck, the sun already west, nesting.
Once he tore his younger sister's only dress
to make lampshades for his future wife.
Once they buried flesh they knew their own,
stuffed the hole with rotting apples. She fed father
the must of her breast, painted his eyes with green colostrum.
Later she would betray him and he would wail *ca o bocitoare*,
break his wrist wrenching off the bed frame—
but here, in this German ditch, details no longer matter,
so they rise and push on in the Dacia groaning now
through familiar potholes, the puckered face grinning
in the rearview mirror. They'd almost lost it at checkpoint,
its unfistable heft lousy bribe material—*You crazy, man?*
What am I gonna do with that spiky shit?
This is the poem of the pineapple hatching on top of our rusting
Frigidaire in 1985, darling kept whole for weeks by kids
pouring in and out at the news of my parents' brief escape West.
Children sucked in the tart air, stared hard, but never asked to touch.

When hospital smells started taking over the kitchen,
mother laid out the good china plates and father rubbed his palms
ready for business. You know what happened,
you who know to core the pineapple as it peaks into sweetness,
who can slide the blade so casually, as if it's always
been yours, this two-for-five dollar token of the exotic.
The inside had collapsed into a vitreous mess,
or so it seemed with all those bloated bodies trembling
in and out of focus on the mute TV. Our latest
casualties: how they'd pushed their luck, whispered love
into the ears of the malignant Black Sea, promised hecatombs.
How they were catapulted back to shore, nameless defectors
discarded as ditch spit, spit on the clean-shaven face of Ceaușescu,
our handsome thief.

Chernobyl

and then those babies were born
and we hoped this was no longer God.

Women curtained carriage tops
with brocades severed from dowry pillows

hurried down alleys, near-smiling,
helloed back when hailed, but did not stop,

did not force us to hear the feral wailing,
did not force us to see the grotesque

heads, and we, expectant caryatids,
did not flinch.