

6 (six) poems poems poems 6

By Vamika Sinha

WHY I LIKE IT: *Poetry Editor HEZEKIAH writes...* Can you imagine living in Abu Dhabi (or Singapore for that matter) and attending NYC?—Sinha has been served thick slices of world class cities. Being rarely welcomed, I am not well travelled; Envy is my constant companion as Temperance is the enemy. Valmika is our valkyrie muse. This line rocks, “i am a girl so i am paper under scissors.” It is our great-good fortune she has quite the killer quill over that subjected paper. “i am a history extinguishable” Burgeoning, able, distinguished, she has a lot to say so I’ll be brief, but feast your eyes on these lines: “asking for the planting of flowers and flags” Offspring and matrimony? “people think of me / with winged eyes; / & mind slanted / towards the sky.” “caterpillar / hair on unshaved shins & / home left behind...” “she wears time. Why / is a woman defined / by the architect?” “bright and asking for attention / like a bruise or /a girl.” What to leave in, what to leave out? Celestial, ethereal, superlative, this woman makes the puddle-water I lap quench like an ambrosial elixir. I admit it, I’m in it for the money, but she just might cause me to commence loving this little gig... Her works are surfeit with lines you can’t forget, a read you won’t regret...

(To keep the poet’s spacing and format, each poem starts on a separate page. Please scroll down.)

alaska

maybe columbus and i have more in common; both arrived at the wrong continent.

didn't i fall into this birth, edged from one world to the next? didn't i get me, a country like that?

i am a girl so i am paper under scissors. didn't he come and cut me up? i am a girl so i am a history extinguishable. didn't he come and set me alight? make my skin known to me. make my skin seen. soft and brown, like earth. earth cupped in the palm, kissed. earth that grows orchids and thorns, houses petals and dead. earth yearning for hands, spreading beneath, settling roots like silk spider webs. i am a girl so i am a country, asking for the planting of flowers and flags. come. i am all raging and sea in between. make the mistake, mis-name me. i am a girl so i am in the habit of errors, errors made on my body. i am a girl so i am only trying, to make the errors of your hands into homes.

at 16, i read a book about a girl called alaska. she pointed at a map, looking for herself. the aleut word "alyeska" means "that which the sea breaks against." i too am driftwood, poem without anchor. i too am a girl, history buried beneath snow like pain

smearred with anesthetic. a margin. yearning for space yet weighted by men and their gravity. a smaller moon nodding to the sun. in orbit.

one day, i will give birth. at 16, she will begin to name herself, in a way we can only do for ourselves. she will search her lines. i will lead her to the ocean and teach her how to draw. in those indigo years, she will take her hand to my neck. feel for the jugular, its rhythm. she will take scissors to paper, how men sink knives into continents, and make herself many worlds. new borders and seas and soil and songbirds. fragments gathered like flowers, tectonic plates like gap-toothed jigsaw. cupped, kissed, grown, anchored. letting down roots that men can try to name but never govern.

self-portrait as airplane

people think of me
with winged eyes;
& mind slanted
towards the sky.
they build me
into a metal
swallow of a girl &
i keep secret
the spread of dream
that makes my body
gold &
soar.

they don't know
how i fly, don't
know how fly
this woman is, how
i could lick cream
scoops of the sun
like a god.

so i look down
at my arms tied & painted white

body, caterpillar

hair on unshaved shins &

home left behind

like a cracked eggshell –

i know i need

to find me

press down into soil skin

soft for a new country, pick

into the brownness:

leave.

roma

(mexico city, mexico)

this life opens with a sheet of water. clear as windowpane. in the glass, a tiny plane cuts across the frame. upwards. a bird sets alight. while an indigenous housekeeper in mexico city parts the curtains of cold water on her mistress' floor, my mother lowers the blinds in my childhood home. the two women take mops to the ground, as if to grind away the debris of time, the scud built up by the moment. clean. it doesn't rain enough at home. my mother did not know, could not even stab a finger at the map when she was flown there. she has remained for 25 years. there is always water spilled on our floor.

at night, when i am trying to dream, el mar finds me. foams at my teeth, at the edges of my tongue, gathers in my eye and crystallizes at the duct. becomes wax when i wake, and melts down my face when i try shake it off. dirt has gathered under my fingernails and dust makes new sky on my floor. i live in a desert. clean now.

in the city, clio lives in colonia roma and takes care of a home. as the hosiery waves from the clothesline in surrender, she talks in mixtec to her roommate, about the sea and falling in love. she says, he left, didn't say the right words. el mar laps at her womb. birth will come soon, always comes, with death on the other side. what matters is the middle, the hyphen we attach. between mouths, between tongue and word, between womb and air, eye and horizon, me and her.

in my indigo years, i will start thinking of the jugulars she cut for me. when i wash the dishes, sun glinting clean on ceramic, i remember. she didn't do it well, the crowning. so they cut me out, islanded me. my skin nods toward blades like sunflowers reach for their namesake. my mother and i carry scissors everywhere. every where. hers is a ghost, edging at the womb like memory. i never met my brother. we are alone. i am a doll made of paper, precious breakable crane, folded on the edge of a continent. the scissors made me; i carry my maker to tug at the seams of my lands. like el mar, i am ceramic shard, only asking to fit.

have you ever seen the veins of a carrot? fine-sanded, like arms of tired woman. clio doesn't carry the child. she never wanted to. when i am walking through roma, i think of her looking out of a window she has just cleaned. she gazes toward a future where there is no weight. where there is no burden of her name. he didn't do it well, her crowning. didn't say the right words. left. roma is full of eyes, leaking like wine poured for masters after dinner. the women wish themselves away in a separate room, coffee in their laps, language spilling down the sides. they talk about the men. in between syllables, el mar dribbles through their teeth. there is starvation, for a world without weight and yet heavy with love. the men laugh in the next room.

the man will hand you a fruit, the coldest orange like a clear spring. he will take your fingers, help you peel the layers. he will guide your tongue, conduct it as symphony, and music will sound sweeter, sudden. he will tell you, this is what you taste. curved flesh like a lute, a globe on strings – heart. this is how you bite, into the heart, he will tell you. hunger is only part of being woman. you will eat so much, so much you will

drum with pain. you will eat so much your body will feel hollowed. it isn't your fault. it wasn't your fault. hunger is only part of being woman. hunger is wanting to be alive.

restoration**(istanbul, turkey)**

at 21, i visit istanbul for the first

time. palimpsest

city. in the hagia sophia, i try to stop

thinking about a man. i do.

the building is a site

how a body is. in repair.

she wears time. why

is a woman defined

by the architect? he builds her

into clock. myth. muse. eye

sore. canvas. country. sight.

temple. every thing but

just a woman. i too fall

prey to how time has bent

prostrate on my body. there, among the stains

made of glass, light

gentle as fingerpads, scaffolding

surges like smoke: aftermath

of hands. somebody

burned her, snuck

under her skin & left

ruin. when i walk in
to the building, fingers
carrying the stink of the dying
body of a cigarette, sophia
stretches before me, scars
& constructions, tattoos & light
coming out her gap teeth, isn't she just
asking for love –
like me. like me too.

0 shades of blue

1.

veins

thinner than breath

or whispers spread

by accident

like cake batter

on a newborn's

eyelid.

2.

clichés,

like the sky.

or messages burning

in cellphone light

from someone

you think you might

love. maybe.

3.

swimming.

4.

a girl a bird an airplane or god

swiping paintbrush:
the veins of a city
fallen in snow.
bright and asking for attention
like a bruise or
a girl.

5.
losing.
again.

6.
lungs spilled on the bathroom
floor; hollowed space where
someone once lived
but moved out.
the pulse does not stop,
syncopated.
though no air is left
and love passed away
dream-like
with the clouds
when you were not looking

down at your messages.

7.

meditation.

8.

laughter lodged

in the voicebox.

the color "no".

ink blotting everything

unsaid. strange fruit

tangled up in the tear

duct. never poured

nowhere but

on the phone.

9.

a duvet never warmed.

a mass of dream

skimmed

by the seagull.

an ocean

left to warm

in the sun.

10.

me, and

a little you.

THE POET SPEAKS: *These poems are all taken from my undergraduate thesis project, a collection of poetry and creative nonfiction bridging cosmopolitanism and women of color. The book is titled *Cranes*, after the Solange song “Cranes in the Sky” and also evokes other interpretations of the word: the bird, connoting freedom; the paper origami, referring to the fragility of women of color in modern society; as well as construction cranes, which refer to sites of building. My poems, and this project at large, suggest that, in conversation with Audre Lorde’s “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house”, that women of color can thus use the creative act as a way of rebuilding that house, and her sense of agency and autonomy over her identity in a society that so frequently oppresses and stifles her freedoms. In essence, this is exactly why I read, write, create; to assert agency and beauty upon those things that may destroy me.*

As an artist, I am heavily influenced by jazz, hip hop and alternative musicians like Mac Miller, Solange, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Billie Holiday and Kali Uchis. The writers that most filter into my work include Gloria Anzaldua, Teju Cole, Elif Batuman, Jia Tolentino, Gwendolyn Brooks, Langston Hughes, Ling Ma, Claudia Rankine, Theresa Hak-Kyeong Cha, Rebecca Solnit, Marjane Satrapi, James Baldwin, Fatimah Asghar, Safia Elhillo, and my own thesis mentor and phenomenal poet Tishani Doshi.

AUTHOR’S BIO: Vamika Sinha is a writer, editor, photographer, and magazine journalist currently based in the UAE. She holds a B.A. Hons. in Literature & Creative Writing from NYU Abu Dhabi, and is the co-founder and editor-in-chief of Postscript Magazine. Her work has been published in The Independent, Affinity Magazine, and KGB Bar Literary Journal, among others.