

**ES (El Salvador / Is)**

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El Salvador, I used to fear you,  
a child listening  
to mom and aunties' conversations  
of women tortured during the war  
the one split from her crotch to her ribs  
two naked girls found charred in a pit

Afraid you might capture me,  
the disobedient one,  
like the suspicious women wearing jeans,  
the ones that talked back  
and raised their arms  
because they did not want to give up on you

I never forgot the muffled voices,  
hushed women  
grew up with me, ghosts tangled  
in my blue bob, pinned through my eyebrow ring  
I stomped in biker boots riding the bus in L.A.  
fishnets, cut denim, and babydoll dresses  
reading pulp like *Angry Women*,  
at the register till past midnight to feed my young family  
women whispered: remember me

I never talked about you, El Salvador.  
Held my tongue when mother told us stories:  
Great uncle shot his wife and then himself on the bed,  
while her cousins hid underneath, hearing it all, and the drip  
of blood for hours until Cristina ran to bang on her door  
Something lies below my mother's face recounting these stories,  
I could only think: and all of this *before* the war.

(And after? What has changed?)

El Salvador I was unfair to you because you are more  
than blood and char  
you are the warmth of my language,

the comfort of masa, the aroma of *aihuaste* lingering on the roof  
of my mouth

El Salvador you are my seventy-year-old mother and her cousin  
giggling in the car, remembering  
when they were children and Cristina climbed the electric pole  
but was too afraid to climb back down  
all the rest stays unsaid in order not to murder this moment,  
our laughter.

I had to live a lifetime to figure this out,  
to return in earnest to the dusty earth,  
to sleep on the warm sand by the comforting sound of the sea,  
to smell your brine  
to mad-crush on you like a new love  
and taste you, humid, stormy, and salty-sweet

like blood.

### **Giants**

Everything seems tall at age four,  
but the waves are like marching giants falling  
to their knees, rolling  
on the beach

The night sparkles with a sea of stars in the cool and still air  
I'm afraid to sleep by the ocean, but grandmother tells me I'm safe  
"Mama Paca"  
let me sleep in the cabana covered in dry fronds  
like open hands, I beg  
I want to sleep with the idea I am protected by walls

She laughs, points to the coral reef of stars, assures me  
as she lifts my chin to the eternity of her face,  
the ocean wouldn't want to take a little fish like me

Small steps on the sand still warm from holding the sun

From the doorway, silhouetted  
cousins sleep on thick blankets,  
a leg and an arm hang over an hamaca

Somehow slumber wins over fear and I sleep

fingering thick, raw fibers  
listening to the crash of giants.