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MOORISH MALACHITE

Fly with me through the throat of the night. I'm skipping across the sky. I'm choosing to tell you where my shadow has been only after I've already left. I crossed the pastel pinks of Lisbon to reach the baked red of Spanish clay. Time evaporated.

At the site of my transfer I adopted the song of Lisboa, hummed on the burgundy aura of the breeze, I danced in and out of conjugations, barely remembering to use USTEDES. The result being everyone is already familiar to me. And all of us are familiar with the inability of my faltering Spanish to fully infiltrate a Portuguese ear: a lover never truly knows the heart of the beloved. I can close my eyes and hear love expressed in so many different languages at once: German, Portuguese, and French; somehow I recognize every word of Italian. It is not lost on me that all of these variants were thrust upon my ancestors and I, replacing our stamped-out tongues, hammered into our wombal chambers before we even fully filled our vessels. Who were we and how did we sound before being conquered?

There must have been so many beautiful traditions and rituals that no one is alive anymore to remember, let alone practice or pass on. Trailing into my short flight destined for the eastern coast of Spain, glancing at all the different colored faces and configurations of

noses, I wonder, am I the only one who resents having been born into assimilation, the script for a life written in the dried blood of cruel ones who came before us?

But what other choice do we have other than to keep speaking with whatever words we know, what other choice besides being silent?

There in the air, then in the streets of the Moorish city of yore I descend into, I swell hearing such a beautiful chattering all around!

Sheer golden light contrasts age-old ivory brick. Indigo light sparkles over peridot waves. My new jade ring shattered as soon as I landed: according to various traditions, this means it protected me from something.

In Barcelona I'm closer to myself than ever, nothing could possibly hurt me here, and I'm enjoying being blissfully ignorant: my phone does not work here and the WiFi is scarce. (In Spanish you pronounce it wee-fee.) What used to be my bedtime will now be when I wake. Before I gather the bravery to try and speak to anyone else, I'm in such good conversation with myself that I can be completely still on the outside. I'm seeing ahead into the world, and, simultaneously, I'm seeing clearly the aura of the past. My ancestors on my father's side came from these lands. Once, a past version of me had blue eyes and blond

hair. Would this older I approve of my pilgrimage, or command me into exile? Would they even have the strength? Here, one can celebrate everything! Especially the life boiling hot in the loins! No one but us knows the fury and the fearlessness in the gusts of the wind. The heat makes a haze of everything extraneous. And when I sit on my haunches back on the shore and the tide comes up to meet my feet and the shyly emerging moon appears on the tops of the now-black waves and the fat scavenger dogs sit and gather with their backs to me, watching and waiting for danger and temptations, I am in my element. There's all the same essence coursing through all of us. Here on the Spanish sands I am leaping ahead into my past and talking back to the future. My grandfather lives again, renewed, with the free vigor of my father. I took my own advice and dropped everything for leisure in another part of the world. Magnificence isn't a strong enough word to describe how skin glistens and glows under the sun here. Saltwater seasons the curls of my dirty blonde hair. Streaks of sand heal wounds before skin even breaks. I'm spending too much and I'm still alive to sing about it. Scripture appropriate angels amble above. Be not afraid, they boom, and drunk off Estrella Galicia I listen. Eventually, I forget that they're there and watching.

All the buildings here in Barcelona have balconies. Everyone is watching from above and no one has to matter. Secrets whisper from the alleyways. Everyone wears linen, sandals, shorts, sunglasses on the crown of their heads. Few wear as much black as me. None are wearing as much jewelry. Many, many young people are about, they stay up and wake late. Most of them know multiple languages, and scores of them are covered in colored tattoos. Hips are wide, shoulders are broad and tanned. Motorcycles dart in and out of lanes on every road, even the major highway. The buildings are modern but already overgrown with ivy. The afternoon is the morning. The prices are low and the sales abundant. The beach breeze beckons by surprise, from an alley you pass by chance. Churches appear on corners with seemingly no rhyme or reason beyond devotion. What are the people here devoted to? Style? Leisure? Sensation? Everything makes me think of New York, I compare, I contrast. We don't have public benches built into lamps and street corners like they do here. We don't give ashtrays at restaurants upon request. We don't pay fairly, we put the burden of tipping onto the customer. We don't smile at each other on the street. Here, mirrors are plentiful, naked feet are scarred and dried by sand. Plants are on every corner. Puerto Rican flags

hanging from windows and snatches of Bad Bunny surprise me! So some of us managed to lay roots and return here without being yet rallied!

Here I find an appeal of antiquity, a city that's stood on the same shore for almost a thousand years: life is lived, not traded as currency. There is always a home to return to, even if no one there recognizes you anymore. You can continue to be loved even if you don't answer immediately. Even if you forget the question. The earth doesn't forget.

As I wait to rendezvous with M., my companion for this leg of my grand tour, I can't help but notice how few others are craning up their necks to appreciate the surreal architecture, the verdancy juxtaposed with the wide modern streets, or the subtle little secret hints of bygone design surviving many wars: Baroque and Romanesque, neo-classical in the nude. I'm looking around and seeing silhouettes that resemble me and don't. I'm seeing and being seen in turn. A woman's cerulean eyes slowly stalk me leaving a bus, I can see her bite her lip out of hunger. I'll never see her again; none of us will ever be satisfied. Even though beauty is all abundant. Most of us seemed to have stitched our third eyes shut. The sun has bleached us ignorant.

I wasn't expecting this heat, which one can't escape; the air refuses to be condi-

tioned; even following the crowds and sticking to sidewalk shadows, delirium approaches. In this addled state I remember my future. Once, far away and not yet, I was Caribbean royalty surveying Catalonia with my chin raised in the air. Treasures adorn me then and now. I wore the waves on my back in the form of an ever-shifting royal blue mantle, silk shot with sapphire and aquamarine. I left my wife behind and await the arrival of my mistress; their birthdays are one day apart.

What was I searching for then, I wonder, and why have I arrived again now? History whispers to me on every sea breeze, warning of vaingloriousness and another lifetime agreeing to assimilation. I feel called to this land though I know it isn't mine. But we were made for the sun, and all of my people deserve to know what Balearic daylight feels like on Black skin. As if golden light given flesh, we bloom best and rise in sweet succulent sunspots. All of the golden and luminescent palaces of the Moors were built for us, once belonged to us, no!

But time has eroded our kingdom as mercilessly as the trading of slaves. "TOURISTS GO HOME" is sprayed in huge colorful letters along a sea wall. I'm reminded of the tried and true slur spat at me in my adolescence in America, mine and countless others: "Go back

to where you came from.” Why don’t they believe me when I tell them that I’m trying?

I’d be remiss not to admit we are not the same us, some of our homes don’t exist anymore, we didn’t all descend from the same matriarchs and the same regions, and there was once a time we clashed and betrayed ourselves — but why was the world made so vast if we weren’t meant to explore it? We arrange our homes in geometric forms and we carve living out of the sea and the sand; but it is the living that must be carved out of us. If we weren’t supposed to dance, why is there so much music everywhere? Every balcony and twisting alley on the way to La Barceloneta sported song, fado and flamenco and snap-banging trap, in which I recognize snatches of my own soul. And there was also the laughter of children understandable in every language, and that seminal scripture written in body language: the wandering eyes of lovers and suitors. Didn’t we all originate from the water of a womb, and weren’t we related once, long ago, before we emerged from the primordial sea?

M. meets me on a vast provincial beach, now we are laid out amongst the searing endlessness. We are not thinking, we do not know, we only feel and savor and devour. 7PM and the emperor sun shows no sign of relenting its radiation.

I am the color of history’s shadow and M. has the paleness of an unwritten future. Some among us have skin the color of too-ripe tomatoes ready to burst with the slightest pressure. All of our differences are as stunning as the horizon that goes out further than the eye can see, hinting at something resembling eternity and a world unfamiliar with war.

I want to immerse myself in such a world. With M. wading behind I lead us deeper and deeper into the cyanic unknown, grinning and laughing as the waves overwhelm us. Yes, since I’ve landed I’ve been unable to stop smiling, my throat which has been itchy for days is finally clearing up, already, since I sat on the airplane and started to scrawl in my sketchbook, singing under my breath, channeling again, the stars speaking through me, and that’s where my ancestors are, not below, not beneath the technomarble or the basalt. The city and all its annihilating lights stretch out on a black canvas behind us. In the cradle of the Mediterranean’s hand I remember being the prince of the wasteland and the Caribbean sea.

It feels good to let go, to shrug your shoulders and ease all the unnecessary off, as good as the sun on the emerald and the tide, finally, shimmering, submerged, the way I wanted to be since last September. That was the last time I

was on a beach like this, the last time I saw into the shadow under the edge of the knife overhead. I stood in the water up to my knees and stared out into endlessness. A ranger walked behind me and called out from the dry: “I can tell that you’re a writer.” Stunned, seen, I said back: “Sí.” I asked every local: have you always lived here? And they all answered, yes. This is paradise. In all there is a share of all. Why would we leave? It is the rest of the world that comes to us: we are not so foolish as to seek the taste of corruption that all others wish to cleanse from their tongue.

But what of those of us who were forced to leave?

Like wiping off makeup at the end of the night, I can’t help but return to that essential question after an experience of inundation by all the beauty abound in Barcelona. Never mind where we came from — to where can we return? And when? There is nothing new under the sun but us. We are the mutating viruses under the all-seeing microscope harshly backlit by God’s inquisitive gaze. What seems to matter, what’s different about it all, isn’t the structures around us, but what we do within them, how we change them and our understanding of them — and each other.

As we walk back to the city scattering sand from our sandals I look over at M. and realize I love her in a different way

than I’ve felt for anyone before. Our eyes meet for an instant and my chest swells with the knowing that I’m looking at my reflection, essence recognizing essence, and that she must feel as I do, too. And that everyone around us can also easily love and be loved. And a new empire could be formed right here, on the bones of all who saved and doomed us before, an empire which would never fall, if only it were populated only by lovers. And I love everyone around us that I don’t yet know, that don’t recognize me, that might never consider me one of their brethren.

I’d like to fashion myself a royal here not to place myself in hierarchy but to lead a revolution in the hearts and minds of all melanated subjects. Call me vain if you wish. You would be right and wrong. Who could really know if in another life I really was Saladin the Second, who had no one to tell about how stingrays sing when the moon goes away? Could I call myself the Count of Barcelona, and couldn’t I lay claim to a utopian rule with as much authority as any slavemaster dedicated to their tyrannies?

So be it. Someone has to shoot the first bullet, and strike or be struck. Maybe I was meant to be martyr. I could be destined or I could be drunk and already sunburnt. But I am in a better city now, and I’ve seen that a better world exists

somewhere on the shores of time too. And I would do anything to lead us into the cloistered garden of the dream world. The earth is waiting for our return to it. Eden can exist again, and the sowing and the reaping may be a titanic effort, but it can be done. If I could reach into your chest to pump the engine of your heart so that you don't have to, so that you don't feel any of the strain, so we all could experience what it's like to live and laugh under the Spanish sun without any effort or enemies, with ease even — I would.