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In the Market

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IN THE MARKET

Mine must be still a decadent spirit.
Today on the street I ate a sugared coffin's
sugared child, and in one swallow Guanajuato's ground,
like a gunshot, opened. I was back in the *Panteón*
I'd toured with Edward, back with the dead.

I can't think what made us go.
With the taste of coffee still in our mouths,
we'd made love. With the straw pattern of the *petate*
imprinted on our skin, we'd washed in the sun.
Down the steps to the fusty vault, I felt his semen
leave me, wet on my thigh. Why would we have wanted
to see bones? That is, I'd expected bones,
not bodies warped in tight skins, in brown
naked hides. Not the scythe of grins, all flesh
made rind. And not the pod of a fetus with its empty
suck at a leathery breast. Edward said—
the ultimate still life, a monumental theme.
But I heard the baby smack its lips, and I fled.

I found myself in the market, touching onions one
by one. I traced silhouettes of shoots and calla stalks
on air, watched one bud split its caul and the white
spathe open. Cold, I let street life slip over me.
I searched each face, in each heard a dry, deathly
smack of the tongue. But I realized for the first time
power—the power to see a world buried in daylight.
I was a lens—and I saw.

There rose up for me
that day in Guanajuato's streets the dead and the living—
they breathed through my breath, they rinsed through
my pores their blind needs. They were hands
scrubbing clothes, they gripped shovels
and newspapers, lifted cones of bananas, carried
crossbeams on their backs. They went down in the mines
to a source like their mother—they danced in the dust's
brief abundance. Together they endured.

In the street a man shouted a drunken *vacilada*,
hermetic pain pulled inside out, mystical
and snickering like a mescal worm, laughter
that stabbed at the light. *Los muertos mueran,*
y las sombras pasan — the dead die, the shadows pass.
But the air they breathed, we breathe. Their faces
backlight our own, our lives spring up
from their dreams—light
in the work of these thick city streets.

In the center of town I saw
an old rusted pump the color of ocher,
color of bloodstone, ancient as the channel of the vulva,
menstrual color. Near it an old woman in a black
rebozo stacked tortillas on a cloth, a *brasero's*
charcoals glowed, and the old Ford motor
used for grinding the *pueblo's* corn chugged along.
There was a smell of oil, smoking meat.
I remember the water's iron taste—I used
two hands to pump it. I drank from a gourd.

I thought of lilies—how they pull water clear through
their green channels. In them was presence,
an ease of future. As for me, watching dark water
splash in the dust, wiping my wet chin on my sleeve,
washing my hands in the earth-colored wet—
I'd have struggle, *la lucha*.

SOLEDAD

When the room echoes in the morning, and air is dust,
when troubles shadow the floor where sun once
struck the *petate*, that's the time
to enter the body and stand firm there.
And if you're a woman,