

Girl, Cow

1.

Yesterday I practiced combining the stars into a mass larger and brighter than the sun.

Less than half a hemisphere is what it takes to be stronger than you, I told the sun when she was noon, when she was closest to reaching through me. *Remember that*, I told her.

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The cow's great, pale body. Sharp hips. Long ears, sweet ankles. Could I have found a different one? An older one who knew how to be milked? What choice was there when my mind said *now*?

I see schools of sardines sleeping in shallows. Their bodies hang, not touching, swaying as if on a string.

They begin their long roping swim, the sun barely catching their scales. Huge tunas and barracudas know our shadows, our limbs, the elongated points of our spears.

I look back and take in the pines, the wide spaces between them. I see all the way to the houses, the dark shapes. White egrets sleep in high nests, their mating plumage long and thin, wispping from their chests.

The fishermen should be finishing the last of their bitter root coffee and whatever egg or smoked fish they ate for breakfast.

"Come, cow," I say to her. "I need a name for you."

“Samira,” I tell her. “You’ll be Samira.” She blinks her dark eyes and resists stepping into the water past her knees. She pulls her head back and looks toward her long pen.

The night before I left, I said a prayer to the sea. *Let me know something of the next months*, I said. *Let me know something of the coming year*. I prepared my bed, made a circle of flour around me. The sea did not tell me anything. I did not dream.

Monk

3.

Silence means the click of thumbnail against wooden rosary, the turning of thin pages, the crack of old knees genuflecting. The scrape of metal spoon against ceramic bowl.

The shuffle, the limp, the hustle of ambulation.

Coughs, sneezes, sniffles.

Silence means the wet hesitation of resistance a potato makes with each pass of the knife. The dry rip of collard greens removed from their stalk.

It is hearing a throat swallowing milk. A throat swallowing tea.

The dry sockets of teeth chewing bread.

It is hearing the air around hands as they perform ritual, as all men move in the same pattern. A touch to the forehead, to the heart, to the shoulders. As hands come together to touch palms.

Silence means hearing the fabric around our bodies, the swish of robes. It is the strike of a match and the fizz of flame catching. Of breath ending flame before it reaches fingers.

The moon-fed movements of the ocean and its response through the cedars.

The falling of those cedar's needles or the thump of the cones.

And always the *tsk tsk* of straw brooms cleaning some corner, some hallway.

Silence means hearing bodies turning in narrow beds, the scrabble of mice feet and the muted whoosh of a raptor.

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This silence meant I was not alone.