

City of Skypapers

Marcela Sulak



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Shekhinah

I don't shake before the dry yeast that elevates the loaf,
and when I measure the flour, the wheat does not rattle in the fields.

When I break the first egg, break the second, the chickens
do not pause in their pecking, the insects in the grass

continue to hide behind their blades. *Companion*
is still one who shares my bread. The wreckage

of the Byzantine village scores the hillsides
of Srigim-Li-On, a wine press and an olive press

beside a fig tree, and as wildly implausible
as it seems, I am alive today. I do not tremble

before Shabbat, I do not fear the *shekhinah*
will reveal my poverty in the shadow of her light.

I know I am her mirror, and because I am here,
everything will be brighter.

The soup plates will not break
tonight. I will place roses in their vase, candles in their sticks.

I have passed coins and cloth back and forth
with the father of the other Marcela, which

is what we call the tailor, and from the grocer,
I have stored. I have run next to the Yarkon River,

keeping pace with the current,
and then I have dragged myself against it.

I will not falter before the blessings of today.

To Get Here Today (A Piano)

To get here today I pulled leggings on,
and a dress, made oatmeal and coffee, cut fruit,
then walked back and forth before a book
bag in the living room into which I knotted two
amulets against suicide for someone I love—
a flat stone Karel drilled a hole into
before he died (having lived in the school
janitorial closet in lieu of a nice monastery cell
because of the communist government)
which I'd found escorting forty Czech children

up and down the coast of Spain, and a black round
of coral my ex-boyfriend's mother had given
me after she lost her other son—and walked-ran
to the bus with them and the gargantuan Norton
Anthology of American Literature Smaller 7th Edition
because I'm teaching Fitzgerald, and A Dream
of a Common Language because I couldn't seem
to find my Audre Lorde and I wanted to send
her something beautiful and surviving, not
something that dwelt only on the pain, but

that explored a way out; someone who knew
(to kill oneself doesn't require, though,
a disaster) what pain can do.
No books composed by suicides. No
Deborah Digges, no Paul Celan. To
get here I walked to the bus stop planning how
and when to explain where babies come
from, for my child's already asked, and I thought,
I'll tell her in the summer, for I'm a single mother.

To get here today I lined my eyes with dark sky,
filled in with moss green, and in the crease,
stone. In the street I realized my leggings
were on inside-out. I quartered a kiwi
and halved a passion fruit, for I love the feel
of infinity in the sandy crunch of seeds,
and the viscosity of the other's jelly reminds
me of the frog egg clouds we used to find
as children in the pond in Texas. We'd slide
them into the claw-foot bathtub that sufficed

as a cow trough, caress them saying caviar,
by which we meant luck and money, the stars
that hung over the house in the dark,
and which I've not had in ages. Today I rode
the #56 bus down Derech Ha-shalom
to Aluf Sade, and just past the stop
where the soldiers get off, I noticed someone
had painted the white wooden slats of his fence
black at even intervals, turning his
privacy into a piano again.

After Shmita Year

To get here today we had to get over
shmita year, in which the land lies fallow

once each seven years. The super moon's emerging
from the celestial fields as well, now rubbing

his slow face against the razors of the neighborhood
apartment buildings, as in children's books. Look!

The shadows we'd lost in the Syrian dust storm
have returned, and the sweat that pooled down

our vertebrae, unrelieved by shade,
into the smalls of our backs, is dried.

A crown of birds of paradise is settling right now
against the white kitchen curtains I made from cloud-

white baby sheets when I had *the baby*
instead of this eight-year-old girl, into little green

boats, their orange sails unfurled,
their blue tongues lapping. Outside more birds

rise over the seas of palms. And dates crowd,
red and gold beneath their own green palms, now

felled by chainsaws held by workmen
lifted on mechanical ladders on Chen

Boulevard; they are being swept into clusters
clutched in brooms, in the skinny gold fingers

of witches. I have two boats from the last date-
palm municipal trimming on the bookcase.

We'd gone, then, with Riva to the sea. It was low tide.
The Yarkon River was calm. Soon it will be time

once more for the olive harvest. Soon these birds,
these dates, these olives, will be stacked like calendars.

Also, grapes, pears, fat figs. Once we lived
near the Shuk Ha-Carmel. Now we bike in.

Almonds (large, salted, 80 NIS a kilo)
golden raisins (36 NIS), pistachios

and heirloom tomatoes. To buy the birds
of paradise, we interrupted

the argument the seller was having with a friend.
They'd made up by the time she'd got my change.

We bought passion fruit vines—two per pot
—and sweet peppers—their leaves always look like that—

took our leave of Dalia and Adin, and we passed
them, and they passed us, and we passed

them, and they passed us,
we on the bike, they on a bus.

Since it's October, I will bake
a lemon poppy-seed cake,

because the wild tree outside keeps trembling,
and when she does, constellations fall and fill

our home with citrus that none of our neighbors
want. And some we slice, stuff with salt into a jar,

pour a thin layer of olive oil to seal,
like a sunset poured between surfaces will.

Nevertheless, I still feel when my daughter
has a crown (in her mouth) and a song in her,

and the three guinea pigs whistle, and we love each
other, love as the choke collar fate can yank.

I dream of moving
my laundry horse to the garden for the passion fruit

to climb; it doesn't scratch and tear
the skin like the raspberry bush I left last year

without a fence. My neighbors didn't burn
me in effigy, though the weeds of *shmita* turned

seedy, grew chest high. I have planted asparagus,
celery, beets, Brussels sprouts, roses and lemon grass.

Now day's done; I've made the curtains, pickled the lemons,
baked the lemon poppy-seed cake. I'm watching as time ripens

on the vines and limbs, along the laundry line,
spacious, awaiting the first rain.