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**JUNE 4, 1989**

**AMARANTA**

**THANK YOU FOR DREAMING  
THE SYSTEM**

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I wake up  
the sun is shining  
lilacs bloom on the branches  
peonies teem with ants  
beetles build a new world  
under rocks

today is my birthday  
my mother is making potato salad  
my father is pulling out card tables and the grill  
tonight there will be a party

at six years old  
I feel I've lived forever  
all this spring  
I have checked the robins' blue eggs  
in the nest they made outside our door  
at Easter I held my Babcia's hand  
wore the orchid corsage she gave me  
a few weeks ago we visited Disney  
I hugged Micky Mouse, kissed Minnie,  
visited replicas of Egypt and Mexico  
believing all of it as real  
as Mrs.Bova, my kindergarten teacher  
as the crossing guard outside my school

today I help my mother dust the French doors  
comb the fringe of Persian rugs  
arrange a bouquet of silky roses  
barely hearing the television's watery chatter

my world is garden walks with my father  
Babcia's blue-pleated dresses, Mama's pancakes  
still spring afternoons waiting for swallowtails  
to land on the crease of my blouse

I do not know  
that on another side of the earth  
streets teem with people  
shouting for joy  
this day will be remembered  
red and white, colors of the flag  
as the moment when, after fifty years,  
freedom returned to Poland

I do not know  
that on still another side  
Beijing's streets teem with people  
screaming, fleeing  
red and white, colors of blood and pale faces  
filled with the worst kind of death -  
a death preceded by fear  
decades later, it will be mentioned in hushed tones -  
the "June Fourth Incident"  
that burns the backs of wordless throats

today is my birthday  
I am turning six years old  
relatives and friends gather to eat burgers  
my mother is making potato salad  
I open presents - Barbie dolls,  
clothes, my first bicycle

I blow out the candles  
on my Mickey Mouse cake  
and wonder  
what I should wish for

## AMARANTA

A woman made with the taste of almonds,  
you fell from a tree believed wrongly to be sweet.

You imagined your thoughts could make pools of poison, appear in your niece Remedios's coffee, your red envy casting a gray haze over the village your parents founded.

Your queendom, the porch, where you sewed and sewed in a house without men. You raised the children of others, a spider turned from in horror, your web the home in which others could live.

When your nephew Aureliano touched you, your yearning was wider than war, harsher than the banana company. It threatened to raze the whole village, give birth to a child with the tail of a pig.

Yearning to rise up and fly as only priests and idiots can, you raised a wall between self and desire, shut your bedroom door forever, collected letters to bear to the dead.

Virgin sacrifice, widow of no one, you closed your nostrils to the smell of lavender, your ears to the strains of the pianola, sent suitors away from the porch where you ruled,

For years you sat, weaving your own shroud, Penelope with no Odysseus to wait for. You sought the God your father lost faith in, strove to take a photograph of love and hold it.

I see you in so many adulterers, aging teachers, executives sitting alone on a million dollars. I see you and wish to seek you, sit on the porch beside you, walk in the sun and hold out your thread.

I'd ask your almond-shell to surround us like an autumn day, let us drink the dark chocolate that grants eternal life, let others fly or stay behind walls or go to war or pick the imperialists' bananas.

as we sit on this porch and spin stories, weave of them a flimsy web, making and unmaking our Macondos before the dustclouds will at last call us home.

## THANK YOU FOR DREAMING

you tell me of your dream  
in which Mohammad appeared

surrounded by radiant imams  
he prayed in your family's garage

you speak of the time  
when God broke his own law

showed his enormous face  
and drank tea with your mother

oh, dreamer  
you have enchanted me

with songs  
of your beloved Babylon

laughter at Charlie Chaplin  
your best resistance to war

memories of licorice,  
yucca, Jericho roses in bloom

now, after escaping  
the tortures and amputations

you have made it to safety  
with your hands intact

you will use them  
to play the oud

you have made it to freedom  
with your tongue intact

you will use it  
to tell your stories

you have made it to this adopted country  
with your heart intact

you will use it to find people  
like you, once broken

today, touched and held  
by your dreams

## THE SYSTEM

*The system shines with uninterrupted light.*

– Lisa Robertson

There is grass and clouds and blenders stirring morning mango smoothies.

There is the Brooklyn Bridge and Union Square with Hare Krishnas singing to their drums, buskers reciting Shakespeare. Children rushing to break enormous bubbles blown by a machine.

There are subways and rats and robotic voices apologizing for delays; there are chocolate shops with crystal chandeliers and shiny glass surfaces; there are would-be witches gathering herbs in Prospect Park while drones deliver parcels over their heads.

There are protesters occupying building sites and drivers rolling their eyes at them and more protesters offering roses to riot police.

There are women disappearing from the streets of Vancouver, evicted men roaming San Francisco while Googleati ride by in private buses.

There are gold coins in vaults and gold crosses hanging around the necks of Fox News commentators and miners digging into Incan soil while Goldcorps goes up a few more points on the Toronto Stock Exchange, while Xiomara looks out the window and cries no, I beg you, please..

There are late Renoirs and replicas of ancient Egyptian temples and Scotiabank-sponsored surtitles at the Canadian Opera Company's *Rigoletto*.

There are trays and trays of plastic water bottles at every academic conference in every windowless hotel banquet hall; there are bus maps and Gothic revival churches dwarfed by skyscrapers; there are gods and there is God and how are any of us supposed to know the difference.

There are steel mills and “men working” signs and stone-faced men and women in the waiting rooms of HIV testing centres; there are garbage continents in the Pacific and

Ghanian valleys filled with broken cell phones; there are businessmen sipping cocktails in Grand Central before catching the train back to Scarsdale; there are turquoise beads hanging from garlands in the shops; there are big box stores and weeping statues, heaven and hell squeezed down to the size of a single tree; there are vans painted in William Blake drawings and underwater grids containing all the parts of ourselves we'd rather not have to see.

There is toxic forgiveness floating like smog around those who haven't asked for it; there is the Bloor Viaduct hand-built by the old dispossessed, now guarded by high fences to keep the new dispossessed from jumping off.

Is there any border, any ring, any outside to this system that holds us, this net that economists deem beautiful? An edge to the web that contains us like flies, a wormhole we might crawl through to another planet locked inside ours, waiting to burst into leaf? Is there a way to find the sea in the reflection of a building, to look up and see the sun?

I see disasters and tears and gated communities patrolled by labradoodles; I see hatred in the shape of beauty, an onion of crystal ice.

I see apartments and buzzers and kitchens and floors, groups of people scribbling post-it notes with the names of the famous and pasting them to their foreheads, an endless party game where we sip our wine and eat our brie and ask each other who we are.