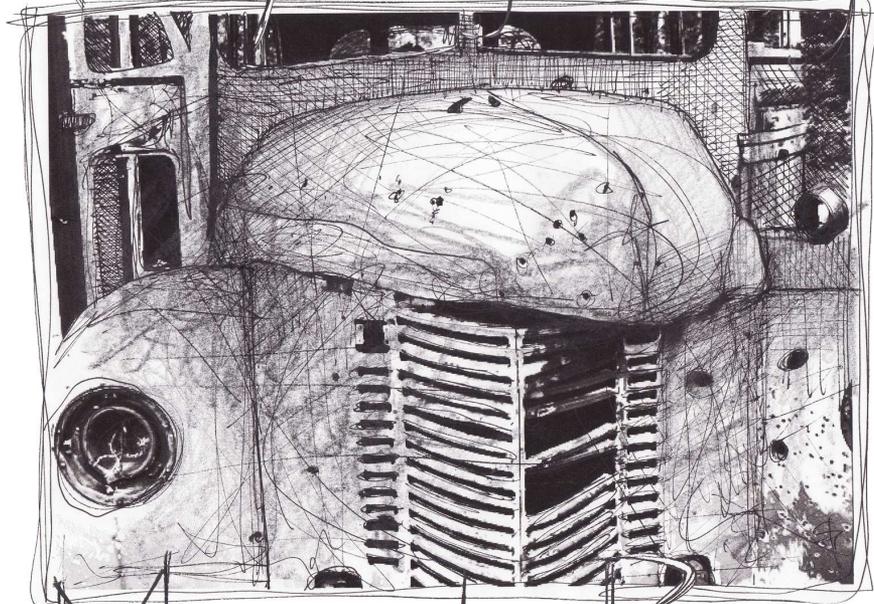


Noonday in a Forgotten Country



Marguerite Tigeon

Embassy meeting

Open the bag. Remove the tape.
Show your number. Behind three sets of doors,
a room. Sit down. The ambassador
will be with you shortly.

In her mouth, a dry leaf of patriotism.
Frostbit smile. A handshake like a foot
through thin ice. Her views are maple hard.

The ambassador puts in long hours.
Plain devotion blankets contradictory duties
like snow. She peers over its banks
at my tape recorder.

Charged questions don't rattle a diplomat.
Nothing is clear. My notepad scratches
confirm only that I've tried.

Outside the doubled window,
noonday smog and people are hustling,
thirsting.

Here in the air conditioned swirl,
a faint smell of ink follows her out,
the hint of stamps, of coveted, safe passage.

Hotel

The room is a time warp.
Windows would let minutes
seep in like moisture, but there aren't any.
Just a hum.

It's the hours in the hall,
invisible feet along linoleum,
old bachelors, five o'clock shadow.

Further on, the lobby
where a keeper snores
to an American film dub,
the action set in the not-so-distant future.

Outside, a rickety landscape of erasure,
prehistory summed up in a single
scarred palm tree trunk
on a deserted traffic island.

At its peak, no bows. A cluster of coconuts
that have forgotten when to fall,
when to crack and pour their milk.

Marcala

Noonday in a forgotten country.
No smile to lift her burgundy lip-lined mouth,
the money seller still gives a decent rate
as her fat cat stretches across a row of sticky candy jars.

Heavy grey sky. On the muddy lanes,
thick splatters rise from bicycle tires, a cloying
whiff of ripe mango. Boys turn in their seats
to test vulgarities.

A sudden column of soldiers
like a millipede scurries by just as the rain
teems down. The smell of sweatshop cotton and one
suspicious smirk from a store minder's child.

Self-pity can arrive like a monsoon.
Thoughts of escape, a hatred of unfamiliarity,
wet things, and poverty warping the light.
Fear of dirty hands, of missing the last ride out.

A small deeply sunned elderly woman
less than four feet wears no shoes,
a heavy sack of potatoes on her head,
another in each of her hands—a marvel,

though her pluck deflects this attempt
to cast her as a model or a reproach,
and it is left to a cheerful fruit seller to wrench
a valve for guilt: as the traveller leaves,
he shakes his head, dark hair parting into multiple,
soaked question marks.

Transport

Repurposed school buses,
once safe conveyances for teams
of pudgy soccer kids from Idaho,
Sudbury, Scarborough, now nicked
yellow blades that chop this road,
swing cliff-side like heroes, touts
in the isle weaving bouquets
of pink currency between fingers,
hips pressed into seatbacks to collect
as underlings hoist more payers aboard
then fling themselves out until speed
and the curving road nearly break them,
young men's games of holding on tight,
but a gamble I take for no good reason,
praying for my skin as if it were golden.
Behind us, at lonesome tire repair, honey,
coffee and hammock stands, young boys
stand without shoes, cling to rocks
instead of wheels, gearshifts, breaks,
or gold. But someday.

Sisters

Small flames in the hills
of Morazán. Giggles
through half-rotten teeth.

Gleeful, Julissa hops
the open sewage drain
to wave a hand puppet
my way.

Nidia, serious Lenca child,
swings in the faded hammock
just her face over the edge,
smiling, considering.

Moths thwack
the drooping netting
each night as they sleep.
On the wall,

their late grandfather
fades in a cornfield,
his khakis crisp,
M16 cocked.

Martyr

You are everywhere now,
glazed into street vendor key chains.
On one afternoon tour I count you choosing
your preferential option for the poor
five times.

You are always Spartan
and I suspect you smell
like a priest I used to know
who shared your late-Seventies
ecumenical aesthetic.

In one mural, finally,
a day off. You jump at the chance
to lose the pulpit and strike
a relaxed pose in a composite
volcano-lake-mountain-scape.

At the tourist site, I step
into your preserved study.
The on-duty nun politely withdraws.

Your empty wooden chair and typewriter
have been kept, hopeful
and tongue-tied as children
awaiting your return.

I consider your moment,
a time when sense had become twisted,
bound like thumbs behind a back.
Like now.

You loosened the bindings.
And then they took you out.

You have the delicacy
to support this limited conjecture,
sharing a patient silence
until the nun coughs, signalling
that even you need rest.

Music

Oh, the girls at the appliance store sure can move merchandise, their ruffled micro minis flick up and down with their asses as their tennis shoes remain planted apart and their hips play tricks dancing to the sound of sales on this Monday morning, as the guard cradles his long, cold gun and thigh-high speakers buzz with pitches from the DJ. Reggaeton, reggaeton, throaty with a static beat, fun despite itself, the tune of midday sun and tight abs as the *barrio* darkens and the police approach, as the border guard's flashlight blinds the crossers, a monotone of home, like beans and tortillas with Coke. Home strung guitars and socialist lines are gone but war is forever; this time also gets its song.

Mine

The mountain has a problem.
It's been chomped, the way a child
pulverizes half a cookie then spits.

A man trots on his too-small horse
outside the mine's barbed fence.
His machete is beautiful but dull.

He passes the gunmetal grey
collection pond, more boring
than a dead tongue. He doesn't look.

I do, speeding the other way
by truck. I think my own tongue
will die of shame.

But no. I have too many questions
about gold, passports, heavy metals.
Also, am I more pond than machete?

In the town, taps gape with shame
at cracked palms and itchy scalps.
They refuse to cry.

Back in Canada, I spill
copious tears no one needs,
climb a mountain, sleep, write.

There, at night, kids joyride,
toss firecrackers: brief, angry snaps
in the black.



Marguerite Pigeon is a writer of poetry and fiction. Her first book of poems, *Inventory*, appeared this spring with Anvil Press. She has also recently completed the manuscript of her first novel, *Open Pit*. A former journalist, she holds an MFA in Creative Writing from UBC, where she was the fiction editor for PRISM international. Originally from Blind River, Northern Ontario, she now lives in Vancouver and works as an editor of academic publications.

The Olive Editorial Board is:
Douglas Barbour, Thea Bowering,
Jenna Butler, Hedda Hakvåg, Judy
Lin, Nduka Otiho, Michael Penny,
Cole Pettifor, glenn N. robson,
& Christine Stewart.

Season 10, issue 3, Tuesday November 10'09

Copyright 2009, [extravirginpress](http://extravirginpress.com) olivereadingseries.wordpress.com

Special Thanks to our Host! CAFE
LEVA
11053 86 Ave. Edmonton. AB www.levabar.com

Design: glenn N. robson Cover: J. Hiemstra-van der Horst



AP!RG
Frame 30
PRODUCTIONS LTD.

