



Photograph by the author

Alexandra Karam

Two Poems

The Monarchs

Our hands can't lay hold on the ages.
Yesterday and tomorrow drift from our grasp,
though the first creatures turn in our bones
with their slow steps.
Schools of fishes swim through us.
A flood of starlings rises from our longing,
to spill upward into the evening sky.

I love and lament a red leaf fallen
and all the ages past and to come,

the dying out of stars,
our fragile passage here,
still echoing in a garden left wild.
I am thinking about our trouble,
and all we have made and unmade,
brought forth and forsaken or lost.
What a distance from our molten beginnings
on a morning of butterflies and bright air
to this night-tide that holds us fast,
all history fallen away.

Still the monarchs make their long voyage
through streaming pathways of changing light,
as they have always done,
to the autumn forests of Michoacan
where the pines wait listening
for an avalanche of soft flight landings,
burnt orange and black.

To know what they know
is not given.
My course is not plain.
I carry no compass, do not know the way,
my destination unknown,

and finding no blueprint,
no map for the journey,
follow the widening path between mystery and mystery.
There is one road only
by the shore of the sea.
It comes into being as we go.
We create the road
by going.

Marseille

Night rises
like smoke from the earth
through the trees in my neighbor's garden.

Solar winds carry memories of water
to the moon, her dream of the abundant sea.

Voices rise in the dusk,
the rose sky darkens.
On my balcony white bougainvillea is blooming.
My cat reclines on the threshold and watches the doves.

Across the backyards a man strikes his wife
and his spotted dog,
because it's unbearable, he cannot bear it.
Across the city, across the earth,
not a word for what we know.
On and on,
so clamorous and dense,
my room is turning.
It will burn in the great fire.

Afternoons,
down at the port,
the men of the city are fishing.
Their lines go down
through the rubble shifting in the velvet water,
and two dead fish drifting, forward and back.
A small girl is feeding them bread
to wake them again.

The empty ferris wheel is turning
between the church and the sea bank.
Bonne Mère watches from the hill.
The begging man never lifts his head from his knees.

Farther out, toward the wide sea,
light on the water, only light,
the unvoiced question slumbers
in the shadows of the waves.

Light within light, don't let us fall away.

The way lies here
because I am here.
Threads of clouds,
pebbles underfoot.

We have betrayed almost everything
of every color and kind,
but the full moon is rising behind me,
gulls in the dark blue air.
She spills her cold flame into the sea.

In the red earth there are black seeds.
Soon, rain.

Alexandra Karam was born and raised in New York City, leaving early in her life to spend many years in Mexico, San Francisco, and France. Her primary interest, aside from her seven children, has been black-and-white darkroom photography, but her focus has shifted in recent years to writing. She now lives in Montreal, Canada.