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## Pai dos Burros

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My friend writes to say, in Brazil  
the dictionary's called a *donkey's*  
*father*—why, I don't exactly know,  
except I like the shape that ambles  
into the room, breathing odors of hay  
and dried roses; two moist, pink nostrils  
flaring open, of a sudden and in some alarm  
as a country splits open, laid upon its spine.

Two thumps on the table and there are hills  
the color of buff or parchment on either  
side marked with the dense and closely  
nibbled grass of language. And in Neruda,  
this donkey bearing the world is *lomo*  
*de buey*, *pesado cargador*— in homage  
to the leathery blanket on its back,  
stretching all the way from the tail  
whose point waves in the air like a frond  
of woven palms, leading the way into  
the city's alleys and Sunday markets,  
up the laddered neck and behind  
the ears; triangular, quivering, alert  
as radars, dusty but folded gently  
like chinese fortune cookies enclosing  
the marks of yeasty love and mystical,  
risen futures.

Wedged in the door-  
frame, it holds portals open so the wind's  
thousand and one names can enter,  
and the night's catalogue of longings  
can trail behind like brilliant drapes. Good  
beast, unbudging, sometimes difficult to entice  
from table to bed and back; large and knowing,  
still full of ideas I've never embraced

before. Indifferently chewing a daisy,  
it watches me, its baskets brimming  
with odd relics and tasty treasures.  
Leaves of the grape, rolled around  
a cake of ground chick peas and dipped  
in tamarind sauce and lemon oil. Minaret,  
tambour, flask. Stucco, cistern, the neck  
of an amphora to demonstrate other  
methods of declension.

Whisper of wrasses  
mating in the waters, the hunger of cichlid  
fish. In my dreams, I am on a wooden  
rowboat, a pod light as cornhusk paper.  
I wait for a swell to lift me high aground  
on a beak-shaped ledge, where thousands of birds  
make a canopy denser than trees, and the island  
is a donkey's back submerged in ocean water.  
I want to be marooned here forever, my skirt hitched  
up and the waves' many tongues ascending; with my can  
of tinned notes, my singing shells, my alphabet of stolen  
sweets, ciphers and maps— send me to the depths:  
the shuddering world, your fragrant,  
musty body, my twin heart.