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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.