

Where the Boats Have Eyes

We have swallowed
too much cake.

Visions bright and swift, one
frame and then another,

another, another
crowd inside

us, gritty, hot, glaring.
Memories that have

no place in this,
the Middle West.

Restless in joy,
shining, black

braid sliding to
the waist,

“Wait.”
in French and Arabic,

tried in English:
“Un-depart.”

Cargo ship kitchen, smell
of fuel and baking bread,

and sea.
Awake, await, a

heart without weight, a compass
through a sudden skin.

Dispersing safely in the dark,
toward the center

of the Mediterranean.
Islands where the boats have eyes,

white sun, bleached-rock port,
a steam of scattering turbans,

unnamable colors, dyes
wrung of slick sea-animal bodies,

dementing mosaic alleys, fish
scales like topaz, amethyst, flung

from sooty market knives
spark in burnt dust,

sandstone cities turn
to gold in falling suns. We

are brimming full
of memory,

frosting,
butter, thick.

But we are in and of
the Middle West.

Square plots of
rising corn in rows,

honest brick towns, maple
trees, flags, fresh-painted

chapels, white,
with their tidily suffering

Christs, palms and ankles
red,

but only
in trim dots.

In the Middle West, we
make no mystics,

no starved,
extravagant temples, but

in August,
the cicadas scream
“Closer,”
“Un-depart” and some

of us remember
pictures, moving,

another and
another,

blind-bright, rushing
away, the story

of your life before
you stayed.

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