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Mujer de Guatemala in the Years of the War

You are a Mayan parable
a lesson with broken arms and legs;
the consciousness of a country
braided tightly around your head.
Sky, sun, earth leave a list of scars
healed by the birth of the coffee beans you sow.

The popping of distant gunfire keeps you awake.
You sleep with your eyes open waiting to make
a treaty with the morning. You are guarded by
the faces of your brethren that smile in the fog.
You wave. They are your namesake, the disappeared.
Herbs and flowers honor them on your alter by the stove.

Suddenly the night is made red and orange by your sons
hung like burning torches swinging upside down
from your papaya tree.

You dream you are inside a truck, wrists tied behind
Your Quiche tongue waves like a shredded red flag
tied to the snout of a machine gun. Thighs are opened
like the throat of a singing bird. Many men enter you
and dig deep enough to break a well of blood.

Arms unfurl your body into a crowded ditch.
Rain moistened your lips. Death glanced your way.
A thirsty chick squats by the ashes of your torched home.
You curl the old rosary blessed by el padresito
in your palm.

The bananas tied to the hinge of your door are ripened black
good only for flies and maggots.

Your daughters scattered like seeds in the nearby mountains
are the little rivers in your eyes.
Your men seeped in mud flesh pecked by hungry birds
feed the foliage.

The sound of silence is speckled with the wailing of
women by the graves.

There are quiet things left; the soft breathing of the trees,
the smoky fingers that rise from a morning fire,
church bells chirping in the distance and a long
horizon of stories rolled into a ball
translated into a whisper from your scream.

by Yolanda Nieves

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