

Nisha Bolsey

The Middle Hour

nisha means "night" in Sanskrit

This hour the sun begins to wane and replacing it is
the slow creeping of chaos onto the aloe,
quiet onto the flowering laceleaf
the growing doesn't cease at this hour; indeed
it accelerates, the willowing leaves gasp in their breaths
the windowsill lets them go
when it's over, the silky film of what's left
can be glimpsed but not held

careful, girl
you could poke your eye out with the
night, razor-sharp
you could fall asleep and forget
you could leave the house without noticing that at this precise time of day, everyday
something essential leaves you
you could be left wondering
is it that you long for it
is it that the passing of time leaves bitemarks on your heart

You are not invincible
The world gets bigger when light is lost
your loved ones get further away
and each passing second
gets you more inches of loneliness
what does that say about you
what does that say
about your name
what will they think when they hear its silver sound
dropped
a tender slice of something soft to the touch
but bitter
to the taste?

The Bougatsa Shop

Squares of custard tempt us from the window.
It's afternoon & behind the counter stands Vassili,
his mother's cookies twinkling in the pastry case.
The two of them have run this shop since his father died
& together they make the best bougatsa in town.
Sweating & starving, we're on our way to the sea.

It's July & relentless & we need that seafront
air. Old men walk slowly past the window,
some stay & gossip over bougatsa while others head into town.
We stand at the register, mouths watering & Vassili
tells us about the storm last night, six people died
in trailers overturned by vicious winds, a case

of murderous gusts on no typical summer night: in this case
the sky filled up on wind & rampaged along the seafront's
edge, snapping trees. With its last breath it met a fisherman. Left him dead
out in the water. Last night I'd seen the lightning from the window,
slender violet scars, but this I never imagined. I look forlorn at Vassili,
my eyes jelly-glazed, how could something like that happen here, a town

that's called a city but feels more like a port town,
one made of cinnamon sugar, semolina & a case
of staggering tenderness, sweet always on the tongue. Before long, Vassili
has changed topics to his fiancée & wedding plans but I'm still at sea
looking up at that wretched sky, those merciless waters. Pretty soon the windows
will shut & the shop will close for today & it'll be like the whole street has died

without warm feta & slowmoving customers, everything else drops dead
honeyed conversations, kalimeras floating in the air like smokestacks over town,
Nikos. The flowery script of his father's name adorns & permeates the window
in orange, elegant citrus. I look down to steady my feet just in case
I am about to be taken by the winds, down the alley & over the seafront,
maybe to the islands or to Piraea, not far from where the storm hit. Vassili

begins to chop the bougatsa into smaller squares, efcharistó, Vassili
we'll have one crema, one feta, some cheese pillows & some death,
the crust flaky like late summer grass. In this moment you can see
how no one but the bougatsa salesman could know this town
so well. He wraps the pastry in paper to safeguard them just in case
& finally, bougatsa in hand, we all smile, a creaky window

opens into July's last surviving winds. Burnt afternoon & time to close, Vassili
begins to empty the pastry case & I caress the little squares headed for their deaths.
Three weeks in town leave me with greasy fingers, eyes bursting with the sea.



Nisha Bolsey is a writer and activist from the Pacific Northwest living in Chicago. Her writing has appeared most recently in *Tiger Moth Review*, *Rampant Magazine*, and *Tiny Seed Literary Journal*.