

Blood Quantum

by Paul McQuade

Fathers fingers are in California,
in a memory of crumbled earth.
His hands make avocados
blossom lizard-green.

They swell until they are
globes of fern-leather;
planets, unreachable,
in silence.

He sends them back in boxes,
the fragile flesh crushed.
Spiders nest in the shadows.
Our hands become brittle with bites.

Mother gathers a garland
of jackal-hearts,
drapes it over
the plough-horse and says,

"Carry it over moors
and spire of thunderbird red,
across plains of aged ichor
and yellowing suns."

The beast foams white
as it crests the mountains,
dives into a den of coyote caresses.
The stars gallop past extinguished.

I play in the dirt with cattle bones
while Mother rattles the sky.

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She tells me I have my fathers eyes.
The words come through bloody fissures in her lips.

Father tills the bleak West.
Gold spills from the hills.
The avocados whisper their
wrinkles into his hands.

Mother weaves the dry grasses
and ragged weeds blown black,
binds them with spit,
tosses them to the wind and says,

"Carry it through the peerless blue
of sky and of sea, past the mountain passes
and the wailing caverns of the deep -
through sleeplessness and ghostly ephemera."

The wind lifts its voice
and the flowers scatter:
fragments of indigo,
shattering.

The boxes come less frequently now.
Our hands begin to heal.
Mother listens to the Earth.
I learn not to cry.

She goes to the river and says,
"My love flows like your heart flows,
bear it hence and let it reach the dry roots,
let it drench these Americas in green."

The river breaks on cragged rocks,
sighs its mists into a callous sky

of heat and warped glass.
Over California, rain -

plummeting
until
at last
dust.

