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Banished

Miriam Arteaga

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BANISHED

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Mirium Arteaga
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THESIS OF MIRIUM ARTEAGA APPROVED BY

Christopher Howell

Date

Jonathan Johnson

Date

Miguel Novella

Date

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Banished

prologue

this sky is not mine. my home,
Eldsmalhe, pink hued planet, fills
my horizon, takes my sight and mind
as its own. home. can I still call it home
if I am not wanted there, banished
to this moon alone, and suffering.

but there is more in my sky:
a moon of blue where water
reigns, a moon of many a valley
and mountain range; a white
moon where glaciers shine; eleven
moons in my sky; my moon and I
but a sphere of red in their skies.

split between then and now,
my sky half belongs to those
eleven new and bright moons,
half to the familiar pale pink
of Eldsmalhe. while I look to one,
the other hides from my eyes;
they never share the same sky.

from this moon, Eldsmalhe is but a pink hue:
pink cities and life, pink poppies in fields,
on mountain sides. night, when the suns' light
fades and black swallows pink, only then can I
see Eldsmalhe's rainbowed trees, river paths,
the white of snow where I once lived peacefully.

on Eldsmalhe, when the pink left
at night, we had sight of the stars,
twelve moons, dim and colorless; we
pitied them, their rock bodies, grey,
lifeless. what would we have thought,
had we known these moons as bright
and alive?

I am a moon in their cups:
bergamot coats lips, wets tongues—
my reflection, my dim body,
wrinkled in the teas they share,
neglect, let turn cold, waste.
I wish not to be a false moon,
but one who holds the cup,
unaware of the truth.

never will I smell again Nire,
that forest I loved where wind
carried sounds and whispers
of hidden beasts and rain opened
the soil to scents of cinnamon
and the fires from wanderers filled
the night with burning sugar.

three years gone and all I have:
the torn sky of banishment and
a poorly built shack. I have heard
the trees around me wonder why.

my moonhome is a shack of stacked
stones, tilted, sized only for me, and
hidden in a field of white amaranth.

among the many canyons, fiords,
caves and creeks, it is the forests
that reign on this moon. these trees
roam and speak, shake the ground
as I sleep but can they comfort me,
laugh with me, sit by a fire and wonder?

I stood inside a creek, my feet
and waters warm from rocks
plain of body but strange within:
they burned when out of the water,
as if baked on a fresh fire. my palm
and fingertips still prickle.

I built my shack in a glade of what I
thought snow from afar, but was white
amaranth, greenless, taller than myself.
mutant plant: with each pluck and tear
new spines and leaves regrew at once. I
paved paths with those odd creekrocks;
the regrowth stopped, but the soil
in the glade burned.

sat on the flat roof of my shack, I looked
toward the distant snowy mountains,
drank my tea, steam of citrus. today, a giant
tree, shadowed by the suns, stretched
its tall body over the mountains. it yawned
so loud I dropped my cup upon the stone
porchfloor below.

these colossal trees call themselves
the Red Giants: red bark and leaves,
flat-topped heads, some crowned
with thorns twice my size, the oldest
of them big as mountains. their voices,
heard everywhere on this moon, but
their screams shake everything. still, they
are peaceful beasts; I told them my tales,
they told me theirs.

and if on this moon mere trees
were given giant bodies and voice,
to what else has this moon given birth?

there is more to this banishment, I
can feel it: I was brought here by ship,
golden outside and in, flown by my own
people; quiet, tired, bloodied from war.
in the field of my arrival, they gave me
clothes and maps, words of comfort,
and left me without goodbye.

three years wasted: my feet now
eager to wake, my hands pleased
to work, mind ready to explore
this new life so unfamiliar—life
even more beautiful than on that
pink planet.

but this moon is too vast for one
body: mountains of ice and fire,
valleys and marshes with mind,
beasts in waters, skies, and trees.
so much here is new, so much I
want to see and feel. is age here slow
or quick? will I live long enough
to see it all?

here there are no seasons.
should I want cold, to the snow
covered mountains; should I want
the colors and aromas of blooms,
any forest depth will do; should I
need heat, to the barren sands. why
must I walk when the seasons
should come to me?

then: I boiled prunes and peppermint,
plucked from branches that canopied
my home, in snow—snow that fell
endlessly, colored everything white;
snow that was never cold.

where else but at the mountains
on this moon does snow fall?
what on this moon can comfort
me like my peppermint and prunes?

plucked and crushed rose petals,
orange rinds cleancut from its plump
body, I lay both on a stone, under
the strength of the suns; floral and citrus
ready to dry for later soaking, ready
to coat my tongue in memories.

Eldsmalhe, that pink planet with lands
rich with berries and fruits always ripe
and plump; honeywine from peaches
and passionfruit filled my mouth, warmed
my face and belly, spoiled my tongue.

I never knew pain could come from
serenity: the rinds and petals were
sweet, warmed my face and belly,
flowers and fruit filled my nose,
my mind knew nothing more, not
even memories of home.

there is an end to this banishment,
I can feel it. when trees were trees,
when snow came to me, and taste
comforted me, when home was
everywhere, but never in memory.

never will I smell again Sire,
Nire's twin, and how the wind
shook its leaves and branches
heavy with cherries, fat and skinless;
their sugared blood dropped into
my hair, on my lips; sweet, red rain.

the Red Giants smell of fire
and sandalwood, stale pepper,
burnt spices. my nose, my eyes
burn, my mouth and throat dry,
yearn for anything sweet.

I learned quick: when the Giants
grow in body, so does their smell.
young trees, Seedlings, smell of fire
and pepper, of acrid smell; but grown
Giants with their timewarped bark
smell of wet grass, pleasant, fresh.

then: my life was calm, simple.
I lived with snow and the warm
honeywine I made from fruits found
in the forests that surrounded me.
there was no exploration, no unknown,
only comfort, and routine.

everything here has mind, sometimes
voice, or eyes that follow, curious
about what I am. even simple moss,
not wanting my feet to dirty its green,
soft hair slithers away, paves a path for me.

upon the tallest cliff in fiord Umbra,
I sat alone, calm. my view, free from
trees and mountains, and the distant
pink of my planet, I waited for dawn,
its rising suns to burn my eyes, warm
my skin.

then: I spent my days selling
honeywine at the Capital markets
under snow or heat or rain, my
honeywine stayed warm and sweet,
glistened behind the glass bottles.

much is strange on this moon.
but fiord Umbra is a place of beauty
only; here, rocks are only rocks,
soil smells of earth, nothing here
is alive.

there is a valley here that calls upon
the rain when I come near; fat teardrops
soften the soil, let loose the chicory,
breath of nut and maple, sweet butter.
hunger comes with the rain, lets loose
memories of warm food made only
for me. I come here often.

at the center of lake Yar: a tower,
redstone faded and derelict. I saw
no boat nor path to take me there,
no life inside to call upon. I have
seen this lake on the many trips
to that valley; Yar has always been
calm and plain, never before
was there a tower.

in the mountain of Tore, I was blinded
by dark. but my breathing woke
the moths and their wings, a single pair
was bright as candleflame, hundreds
bright as a blaze, set the mountain cavity
aflake, gave me sight and way.

this living swamp, Ermonere, took me
in its thick fog, I could see nothing
but white all around. I felt its tentacle
slither into my breast pocket, pluck
the poppyhead I had placed there, then
recede. the red poppyhead floated alone,
surrounded by white.

there is no place on this moon
safer than on the head of a Red
Giant; leafless, thorn-crowned,
stumpflat. I often sit with my tea,
enjoy the view before me, listen
to the Giants hum; my body and face
vibrate, all life below silenced, unseen.

between the heights of cliffs:
a shallow ravine, never in shadow,
always calm, has a bed not of pebbles
but of colored algae, rainbowed, odd.

I come often to these rainbowed waters
to bathe and sleep. too shallow to drown
me, but deep enough to cover me when I lie
down; always warm, the waters caress my skin
and scalp, comfort me while the algae search
my body for dirt to feast upon.

that lone, redfaded tower stuck
in my mind. life here has no reason
to confine itself in stone. someone
with hands like mine, heart and mind
like mine, built that tower. someone
is here with me, someone banished, too.
I asked the Giants for wood for a boat;
they gave me a slab of bark, shed from
the belly of one of the elders.

I sat on the bark slab, unsure:
the waters were calm without waves,
I had no oar, so I used my hands
to push towards the tower, yet
when my skin touched the surface,
water wrapped around my wrist,
pulled me under.

on Eldsmalhe, waters are holy,
protected by beasts and magic,
and history. in my long life, I felt
the waters only once: a pond, deep
in a forest surrounded by statues
dark and metaled, its waters cold
and soft, left my skin dry.

more time spent on this moon, the less
vivid my dreams. I will remember
always those heartaching first nights,
woken by dreams of great feasts, of
sweetbread, and honeywine in my mouth,
subtle sugar, passionfruit flowing through
my teeth, over my tongue. then I would wake,
alone, my mouth dry and cold.

I must detach myself from all
Eldsmalhe gave me. though,
should my mind detach, will
my heart follow or fall into
the vast expanse of memories?

I floated alone, unsure what
to do, the waters of Yar cocooned
and kept me safe in a ball of air.
calm came, I stayed limp, still,
wondering if the one who built
the tower fell into these waters,
floated alone, too.

I thought I floated aimlessly,
but it was the waters that carried
me, gently, to the redfaded tower
and its iron doors. the handles
cold to my skin, I pushed them
open, stepped through.

the doors led me not to an interior
but to snow covered mountains, under
nightfall and moonlights. stranger still,
one distant mountain was flat-topped,
smooth where the others were pointed,
and where I saw dim lights dance atop.

two days I walked through the snowy
mountains, my breath heavy, my body
never cold, until I arrived at the flat-topped
mountain where I saw the dancing lights.
after many years here alone, with only
the colossal voices of the Red Giants,
I longed for any voice soft and quiet,
any voice like mine.

then: my home sat on a hill covered
in snow and overlooked a frozen lake,
its ice surface so smooth the suns
and moons were mirrored perfectly;
my neighbors from above.

at last I stood on the flat-topped
mountain, the lights no longer lights,
but bodies bright, translucent wisps.
they gathered close, like familiar friends.
I saw their mouths move, their voices,
muffled, as if behind a wall.

am I still banished if I am no longer
alone, no longer suffering? I had hoped
there was more to this banishment
than loneliness. my hope came in the form
of others banished like me.

still nights: dreams of home wake me,
of lively markets, of honeywine
on my tongue. in the beginning of my
banishment, such dreams would have
burned my heart and mind. now,
they bring warmth and a reason to fall
back into sleep.

unseen to the wisps, I watched them shine,
watched their lips, heard their dim laughs,
until one turned to me, offered his hand. I
took it in my own, confused by its warmth,
its firmness, by the sudden pressure come
to my ears and eyes, by the voices now clear,
him and them no longer wisps but real as me.
I stood no more on the mountain, but in an
atrium, glass domed, my red moon now
in the sky above, a dozen others looked at me,
welcome in their eyes.

Vita

Author: Mirium Arteaga

Place of Birth: Redwood City, California

Undergraduate Schools Attended: University of California, Santa Cruz

Degrees Awarded: Bachelor of Arts, 2016, UC Santa Cruz