

The Bloody Planet

poems

Callista Buchen



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On Mars

Dust everywhere: specks whirling over Olympus Mons,
through Valles Marineris, the planet as a pipe organ
filled with sand grains. Imagine the dead here
as bits of dust, as old hymns. From the surface,

the sky looks like pallets of lion skins, salt still between
each hide, as if the tanner was suddenly called away.
Sand laps the yellow edge, the dead marching. Where
is the redness? Who calls these armies?

Swirl. Swirl. The flutter of fur, still bloody, a false pulse
inside storms of carbon dioxide. Red comes
only with distance. Dust cuts messages
through the Borealis basin that could be canals

or optical illusions. The core churns out of tune. Volcanoes
roar, quiet. Sand, sand, sand, the discomfort
of $\frac{5}{4}$ time. Rocks, only for a while, can be alive.
See this, machine of humanity:

dust only multiplies. You are marching. You are a lion. You are
the bloody planet. You are painted red, a shrieking mouth.

The Vine

Tomatoes burgeon on the vine,
split along tight seams. Flies hum.
Red bursts with its own redness.
The red tells you everything:
you see the sweetness, the lengthening
days, the history of the world. Flies hum,
then the slip of cream bodies. Eggs
wiggle open and the maggots, all mouth,
gulp at the flesh until the skin hangs
withered and slack. Without milk.
Until there is nothing left to eat. It is years.
You watch your mother who watches
her mother who has no one to watch.
It is years. Flies hum. The air does not
ooze, does not bleed from its redness.
Your mother forgets to sleep, her mother
forgets to shower, and you are in the garden
where the sack of red, the red,
doesn't shine but folds over like a finish,
like an empty blanket ready
for the cedar chest, and the flies, the flies.



Photo: Megan Kearney

Callista Buchen is the author of two chapbooks, *The Bloody Planet* (Black Lawrence Press), and *Double-Mouthed* (dancing girl press, forthcoming April 2016). She is the winner of *DIAGRAM*'s essay contest and the Langston Hughes award, with work appearing in *Harpur Palate*, *Fourteen Hills*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Salamander*, *Whiskey Island Review*, and many other journals. She teaches writing at Franklin College in Indiana.