

Fold
(excerpt)

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Si la préoccupation principale de Fold est une remise en question ardue des contraintes de la langue et de la lignée ainsi que la difficulté (voire même l'impossibilité) d'habiter sereinement son identité, ce texte prend forme sur un fond trouble de décalages face au rapport très personnel qu'entretient l'auteure à son héritage sépharade, par le biais de sa mère, et de sa mère à elle. Il tente plus spécifiquement de puiser avec intégrité et honnêteté la très courte distance entre la famille et la fille, et quoique écrit majoritairement en anglais, on pourrait dire qu'il ne s'agit aucunement d'un texte de langue anglaise, comme il est né de plusieurs langues à la fois — l'arabe, l'hébreu, l'espagnol, le français, etc. — ainsi que ces langages difficilement qualifiables de la mémoire, ceux rattachant le vécu à un lieu et à un moment précis, tout en les en arrachant en même temps.

— You turn on yourself. And in turning on yourself you turn on me. The words are incantatory. You've heard them before, in the mouth of your mother and her mother before her. The logic is simple enough, and pulls cities from maps, and children from their beds.

You push a fist into your throat to keep words in. Slip into French and out of yourself.

Aime.

Haine.

There is a cost for love and few will admit it.

You believe that when you find the place you will be exonerated of place, that your body will stand in the stead of place and the incessant voyage will end as you pull breath in through your mouth and push it out the way it came. This is no voyage you think. This insistence to put a word to an unnameable thing borders on obsession. Who placed this imposition on your body? With what dictate does your tongue comply? Why must you find what others have lost?

The geography of home is filled with uncertainty. A broken line ramming into walls, collapsing cities and towns, only to disappear in water. A river. The sea.

Voice. You can't place it.

Villa Alhucemas is uphill from Melilla. A garrison town with no real history of its own. In Melilla people disappear. It is a place no one comes from but it is a place many go to. You would snap it from the continent. Set it afloat. Or drown it once and for all. Another beginning place. For your mother's mother and her children to come. *Bli ayin ha'ra*.

But things are not so simple. In her sleep every night your mother drowns. She has told you so, *kappara*. A hand holds her head under water and that hand is your own. This too she has told you. Every night a different dream. Every night the same. Only the colours change. Again and again.

You are reluctant to write any of it down. The dirt floor. The hole in the hill. The candles. The Jew-hater. The mountains. The *t'bila*. The sea. Your thoughts are disorderly. Messes.

Language folds bodies in half. Holds them to the falsehood of significance, the discrepancy of place. You balk at the thought of more words for things, of more bodies breaking against the suddenness of speech and the heart's inability to keep so many versions of the same story.

You form arguments against out of etymologies. Pull letters from words to distinguish yourself from the inconstancy of grammar, the *factice* of lines. You throw bricks at glass to expose its inevitable fragility. You tell yourself you are weak for doing so. This play is not only vindictive but simplistic. Puerile. What have you to prove? Still, there is something in it. You point to the short distance between *la famille* and *la fa ille*. You live in the place between two letters. You are in your quarry at nightfall and you are picking through stones in darkness falling into that familiar emptiness, that impossible place where your name slips from your tongue to shatter against rock. It wasn't yours to begin with.

You have a face among faces and the man tells you so. He tells you this so you will bring it closer to his. He speaks as though he has been tracking you for years. He is not surprised by the accent in your mouth. He expects it. He is, of course, an *ethnologue* and you are a *type* that is familiar to him. You are in a strange city and you are young and although you are afraid you are curious. He traces the lines on your hand back to *Algérie*, back to *Marruecos* and further back to *Sefarad*. His fingers tighten around your wrist. *Non*. There is a glint in his eyes and the beginning of a smile. You are adamant. No, in English. You break away from his grip, take your words back into you, and your language. You slip into the gutter of the strange city's streets, awash with rain and the bright lights of cars. You have a face among faces. You have the face of a Jew. *Frein lahada*.

– You live for the dead before you. A condition. An admonishment. A sermon. A plea. The furrowed trail from Babylon stops at your feet.

When you leave you take nothing, although that weight is always behind you. A feather compared to the echo that hollows your head. It is a strange assemblage of gutted roads, faint cries and the scrape of metal. A tight knot of sound wound up against bone, set against a screen of silence, your own. You would pull at it, and sometimes you do, but you have been warned against touching what isn't yours, so you recoil, as suddenly as if your fingers had touched fire, and you gasp, because you are certain you will drown, like your mother, every night in her sleep.

The distance from mother to daughter is a singular anguish folded into skin. A palimpsest, with traces bleeding through of old text, wrought in other tongues. You have termed it illegible, condemnable, artificial, worn. It is as foreign as the city of cities, which you refuse to call home, as reproachable as that other city you flew to and from, with a fistfull of promise, and then none.