

The background of the entire image is a light beige, textured surface. Overlaid on this are several thick, red octopus tentacles. The tentacles are rendered with fine lines to show texture and have prominent suckers. They are arranged in a way that frames the text, with one large tentacle looping around the top right, another across the middle, and a third at the bottom right.

adrienne

gruber

buoyancy

control

poems

FIRST EDITION

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PROLOGUE

Blend of heat and colour. Bougainvillea bloom in January, cacti buds are sunsets. Scrub dishes, stoke the fire, bring in wood, play a game of dominoes, help Salvador wash his car. Walk in the groves with the dogs, throw them pieces of orange. Occupy restless hands. Salvador makes perfume. Fingers measure and pour the alcohol. The bottles smell like candy. Twice a week the shrill siren of a tortilla truck passes through El Llano. Dogs have flies around their mouths. Women in television commercials are whiter than you are. Learn to say *café con leche*; this is what a woman's skin looks like. Think of a man once loved, planned a life with. Bike down a gravel switchback, launch head first over the handlebars. The bike on top, the sun, a frying pan branded to back. On Saturdays, the market in Montemorelos. Boiled corn mixed with salsa and *crema fresca*. Kids sell toy cars and Spiderman dolls, cowboy belt buckles. Silver purses and pink lipsticks. A scruffy one-eared dog trots by, nipples dragging like udders. Whoever sucks her dry gets a mouthful of dust. Fifty-cent bottles of beer are sweeter than milk. A man lifts iron birdcages out of a truck, glint of green-tipped wings—*palomas*; their muffled throated coos. At the market, look for a mortar and pestle to grind chilies. On New Year's Eve in Monterrey, eat pale cow intestines in gunpowder broth. Shots are heard all evening; children set off firecrackers and twirl sparklers. The neighbours play mariachi until six a.m. A car alarm runs for hours before the battery gives out. Even in rain, no decisions are made. The dogs stay inside, except the ones at the

baseball field, digging through wet leaves at the foot of the bleachers. Leave a beer bottle on the pitcher's mound, a bundle of roadside azaleas. Back at the house, cookbooks exasperate. No recipe for meatloaf. The rain pounding on the roof is worse than the hail of pecans let loose by the night wind. The cold and its contagion. Water moves toward a bed of cement into a pool, the way mercury slides along kitchen tile, thermometer in shards. Stick hands in the meat, raw and slippery. Lupita, next door, calls *Adrianna* and gives little cakes to take home. Enrique's roosters claw the dirt. Always a cockroach beside the shoes, an exoskeleton. In the kitchen, a fire in a small dark corner. Hold hands over until they blister. Outside the dogs carry oranges like softballs in their mouths. There isn't anything to do but pass the time. Dangle feet in the irrigation water. Bougainvillea, hibiscus, buttered sunflowers. Dogs follow to the river. One finds a turtle and bats it around. I can't hold on to anything.

THE HANGED WOMAN

1.

If Tarot were to read itself while driving through Kansas,
boxes crammed to the roof, salt streaking the car,
it would turn up the hanged woman.
Indecision. Twelfth trump card.
The traitor. I need a clear road scraped of debris.
The sun doctors the land pristine, like the white gold
on mother's wedding band, or the sugar bowl
with its blueberry handle. Even clichés of bone
or glass are less predictable in this light. Their protrusions shrill
as teeth. My friend says she believes in the sublime
as a religion. The word muddy on the brain as we make
the drive south. She speaks of mercury molecules, the split
of threaded cells that fall to the floor, skim the linoleum
as silver balls. The highway glimmers. Soon we'll cross
the border.

2.

Sunday in Nebraska there's nothing on the radio
but Jesus. The sun against snow is blinding. Every sin
is sexual. Child sings off-key about the morning star.
Banjos and mandolins play Handel's Messiah. At the Rockport
gas station you can buy Betty Boop alarm clocks, snow globes
holding churches. In Nebraska every gas station is proud
of its kitsch. A room at the end of the hall is filled
with dolls and blank stares. Toddlers with fuchsia cheeks,
missing pupils, white curls. One sleeps
on her side, goldfish lips, pink eyelids and
half-closed mouth. A still, open shell.

3.

Cross the border
at three a.m. Mother refuses to leave the car,
protects my sister's wedding dress.
Everywhere babies and cars with furniture
tied to the roof. First glimpse of Mexico.
Circling the gates, searching for the way in.

Drive through Monterrey early morning
streets slick. Dad strains his eyes. Location signs lie.
80 km to El Llano, then 94 km.

Pick an orange at sunrise when the stars are bright.
Suckle the fruit.
Juice slips from lips as sweat gathers
at the small of my back.

4.

bellinis the tiny windows on planes her lips
on the dance floor jellyfish acid grip
stench of old pennies pulling into the ditch
to masturbate
the small blond boy who eats rice and beans
while watching Ms. Packman a seahorse
liquid that breaks and gushes as amniotic fluid swell
of the tide when a puffer fish is troubled a hand
on your thigh the streets between two and four a.m. balconies
rain surging from the sky old typewriters habits
that should break the word lynx the Neptune fountain
at the Macro Plaza in Monterrey the marbled woman
water glazing her breasts

5.

Each grain of sand is the earth
if you let it. What hatches in your palm
without knowing. The leather seats
bake your groin. Drive into the city where
tar melts the streets. Stop at Tortas Alex
for a sandwich. A sticky ball of baby
spiders nests against your corduroy purse.
They spill onto your lap and spring into the world
writhe against your thighs. You jump
from the car, swear, swipe at your crotch.
Bodies fly in all directions.

PROPOSAL

Let's make babies, something solid that slips
with its own mucus trap, screaming at the world
betrayal with its first breath. This has nothing to do
with love. It's basic sorcery. What you can do for me.
We climb out of caskets
once sawed in half. Birth magicians

like breath.
Like the sticky remains
on the Trans-Canada, the deer whose legs
I ran over in the middle of the night. The substance
we are after, all colour, a freshly painted room

where the smell silences those first few brain cells.
A man pushes two fingers inside me and groans.
The liquid phase. You taste tart, he says and lowers
his mouth.
Remember the truck stop cherry pie
I ate the night we couldn't get to Oklahoma.
The quiver of fruit
membrane on my tongue; how a jellyfish dissolves
on hot sand. Think of the baby

who thrust out, the placenta
its inverted twin. Think of my mother
who couldn't hold her bowels as she pushed
out my sister, the nurse trying to convince her,
pressure in the uterus. And what he moans
in my ear, trying to reach deeper.
A canker in the mouth,
a dark hair wisping from the breast.

A dark hair wisping from the breast.
A canker in the mouth.
In my ear, trying to reach deeper,
pressure in the uterus. And what he moans
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membrane on my tongue; how a jellyfish dissolves.
The quiver of fruit
I ate the night we couldn't get to Oklahoma.
Remember the truck stop cherry pie,
his mouth.
The liquid phase. You taste tart, he says and lowers.
A man pushes two fingers inside me and groans,
 where the smell silences those first few brain cells.

We are, after all, colour. A freshly painted room.
I ran over, in the middle of the night, the substance
on the Trans-Canada. The deer whose legs
like the sticky remains –
 like breath

once sawed in half. Birth magicians.
We climb into caskets
with love, its basic sorcery. What you can do for me.
Betrayal with its first breath. This has nothing to do
with its own mucus trap screaming at the world.
 Let's make babies. Something solid. That slips.