

Gold

for the children of Luz y Vida, Ayacucho, Peru

The children ask for my hair.
My students come with dark angel
lashes and dirt-sullied knees,
shouting my name from the street
before I let them in the door.
The youngest holds a gnawed pomegranate,
the juice spilling its coarse blood
down his shirt. They come hungry and beautiful
to twist themselves into my arms,
feign sleep, stretch out on the hot roof
in the strength of the sun, the mountains
awake in purpled pleasure behind them.
They laugh as though saying a prayer
for every day they've ever lived, even while their legs
are slick with homemade bruises, their arms
carved down to the shapes of their bones – but
I am the only one who sees. What they see is my hair,
the girls curling fingers through a color
they can only imagine on a doll.
The gold, the gold, they say, please give it to us
as if by my strands I can give them America,
the strangeness of it, I can give them
what they believe is so beautiful.
As they bend to their lessons, each head spills locks
the black of a starless sky across their pages, and
I want to turn them all loose
to their own beauty, have the urge to show
them the lightness they give me when they
curl into my lap, wish my fingers on their backs
were enough to send my love through their spines.
They sing for the gold while I teach them
a language that is not their own,
in a country that isn't mine.

Kate Stoltzfus
Broadside "Hair" Contest
Second Place
Judged by Julia Spicher Kasdorf



BROADSIDE
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