

Letters to the Mountain

Dear Mountain,

Tell me again your oldest story,
the one that burns beneath every mother's tongue.

Tell me of the woman who was once your spirit, how she wore
your mists as a shroud, how her hair ran
down to the sea. Tell me how she forged every storm in her mouth
and broke open the sky with her light. Mountain, tell me where
to find her in the women you hold now. Tell me
her wildest storms still howl in their blood,
that you still answer
when they call out
to your blurring summit.

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Dear Mountain,

Perhaps you are
our oldest surviving temple,
and your dust still holds the shape
of every pilgrim who has knelt in your ridges.
Perhaps you are the hardened welt of a fallen god.
Perhaps you are simply a dream
that floats above the resting head of a girl,
and you will disappear as the sun paints her awake.

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Dear Mountain,

Witness the movements of your women's hands —
hands that heft crop bundles larger than a body,
hands that stitch red patterns into navy cuffs by firelight,
hands that bend bamboo into star-shaped lanterns,
hands that fend off unwanted attentions with meat cleavers. Hands that sink cloth
into vats of dark liquid and emerge
tinged with blue. Mountain,
tell me you gather every echo of their work.
Tell me you will remember this language of ritual.

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Dear Mountain,

Tell me of your dead.
Tell me who they were reaching for
as they closed their eyes;
who tucked their bones into your softest layers.
Tell me whether their bones, too, are stained blue. Do you remember
the way they stirred their pots
and gripped their knives? Did their hands shake
as they prepared for slaughter? Mountain, does your air thicken

whenever their spirits awaken? Do you feel them
tremble with the memory of hunger
when the living chop roots in their honour?

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Dear Mountain,
Watch over the girl who sings
in your flooded fields. When she screams, *Save me, save me!*
You must gather your winds and howl your sorrow. You must command
your mist to disappear the hands that bind her. You must release the ghost
of every woman who rests in your folds
and let them wield their white fire. You must let the girl stand tall
among them, her skin crackling with light.

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Dear Mountain,
Know that when the world ends,
your women will press their artefacts into the walls
of your caves — the curing meat, the black sewing machine,
the charred kettle, the white cups of wine,
the orange and green beads. They will wander
far beyond your sight and return
with the fiercest storms in their baskets. They will tuck their knives
into their belts and cling to your rising mists until
they pass your summit. They will carve hollows
in the sky and sit above the gathering dark,
picking their teeth with the stars.