

Alexis Green

Ψάξιτο

She is Guatemalan.
She often speaks of fruits and tongues.
Her language is palatable; her writing a lemon
stained glass of water. We drink the Spanish
words and spit out the seeds.

She is Japanese.
Her choppy English sits in the corner
of the room. She recites an entire poem in her native language.
We listen. They listen (silently applauding themselves
for their cultural tolerance).

This is their world.
They lean in with shoulders hunched,
eyes resting on the bottom of beds made of foreign imagery,
covered in a sticky lust for knowledge
and appropriation.

This is a writing program,
where Greek myth and anti-religion
are the Sheetrock of this house. I am but a guest—smiling
and nodding; avoiding asking questions as a form
of self-preservation and politeness.

I am Black-Ghetto-American.
Sometimes I season my metaphors with mentions
of hot combs and bamboo earrings. And somehow context clues
and a good Google search escape their grasp
when it's my turn in the rotation.

This is the request:
unbutton your background—unzip her tongue;
hike up her skirt and show just how long her language runs. Don't play
hard to get; understand that your "hood" will only be
respectable after we get inside her.

This is prostitution

—my culture turned whore because what in America
has the right to be inaccessible to the white man and his daughters;
what is good writing if not the measure of how well
the white gaze can pimp you out.

This is the punchline:
to not understand white culture is to be
ignorant. To not be understood by white culture is also to be
ignorant. How dare I call myself a writer and exclude
them from the voice they allow me to have.

Here's the thing: I won't.
I won't tell you the actual name of the chicken shack;
I won't explain why we go inside after the same car circles around too many times;
and if you don't know the smell of a burning kitchen and the smirk
of the flat iron that caused it, that's on you.

This is a courtesy.
My blackness will not be made into bite sized
pieces. My ghetto will not unseason itself for your entitled tongue.
You can wash down the bitterness of my slang with the salt
water from Poseidon's shoulders.

I know your questions
don't come from a place of inquiry but a place
of erasure. My Black-Ghetto-American doesn't leave you salivating
over your favorite slavery images and my ghetto isn't
some foreign cathedral you can fetishize over.

I know *everyone*
won't understand. I know that by *everyone*,
you mean you. But I won't water down the wisdom
of my people just so your inflated ego
can have a place to swim.

This is the code: if you know,
you know. And if you don't, you can smile and nod,
as a form of politeness towards other peoples' self-preservation;
or respect the Sheetrock of someone else's
house; or *Ψάξτο*.