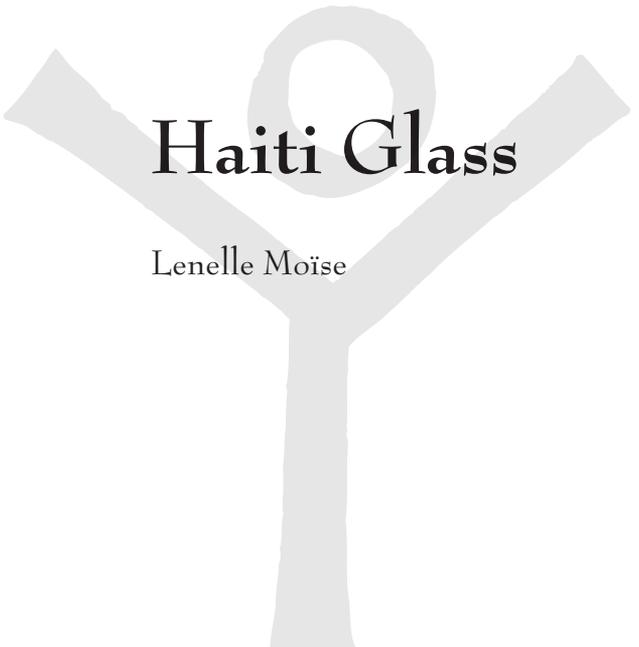




Haiti Glass

Lenelle Moïse



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City

City Lights Books | San Francisco



CITY LIGHTS

SisterSpit

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City
Lights

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haiti glass

haiti glass
star in my mouth

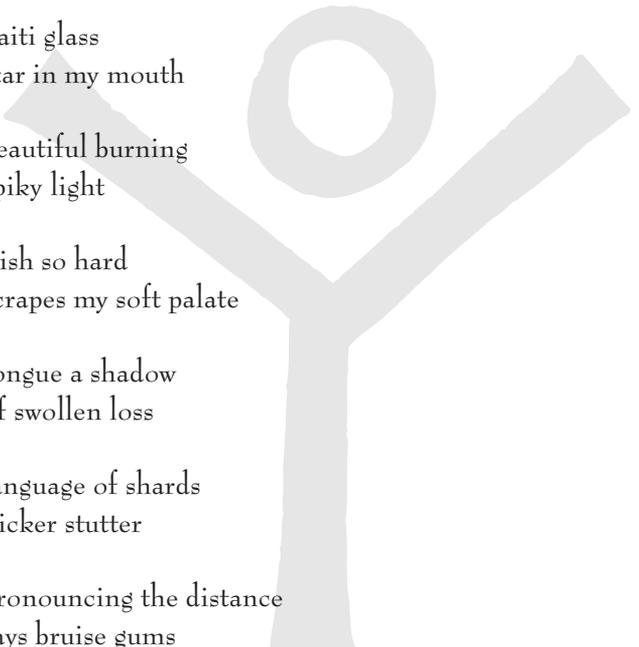
beautiful burning
spiky light

wish so hard
scrapes my soft palate

tongue a shadow
of swollen loss

language of shards
flicker stutter

pronouncing the distance
rays bruise gums



**City
Lights**

mud mothers

the children of haiti
are not mythological
we are starving
or eating salty cakes
made of clay

because in 1804 we felled
our former slave captors
the graceless losers sunk
vindictive yellow
teeth into our forests

what was green is now
dust and everyone knows
trees unleash oxygen
(another humble word
for life)

they took off
with our torn branches
beheaded our future
stuck our breath up on pikes
for all the world to see

we are a living dead example
of what happens to warriors who
in lieu of fighting for white men's countries
dare to fight
for their own lives

during carnival
we could care less
about our bloated empty bellies
where there are voices
we are dancing

where there is vodou
we are horses
where there are drums
we are possessed
with joy and stubborn jamboree

but when the makeshift
trumpet player
runs out of rhythmic breath
the only sound left is
guts grumbling

and we sigh
to remember
that food
and freedom
are not free

is haiti really free
if our babies die starving?
if we cannot write our names
read our rights keep
our leaders in their seats?

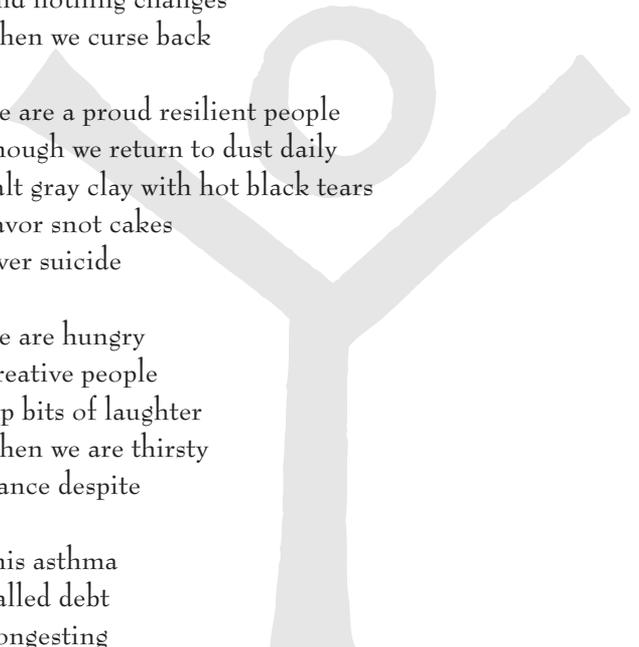
can we be free? really?
if our mothers are mud? if dead

columbus keeps cursing us
and nothing changes
when we curse back

we are a proud resilient people
though we return to dust daily
salt gray clay with hot black tears
savor snot cakes
over suicide

we are hungry
creative people
sip bits of laughter
when we are thirsty
dance despite

this asthma
called debt
congesting
legendarily liberated
lungs



City Lights

adaptation

What I remember about flying to New York from a Haiti I have not seen since I left, I do not actually remember, but craft from the photographs my father took and the words my mother claims are fact.

I wore a gown: crushed red velvet on top, layers of sheer white on the bottom. Panicked, Papi paid a pretty stranger in a fitted dress to sit beside me on a plane that flashed “American” on both sides.

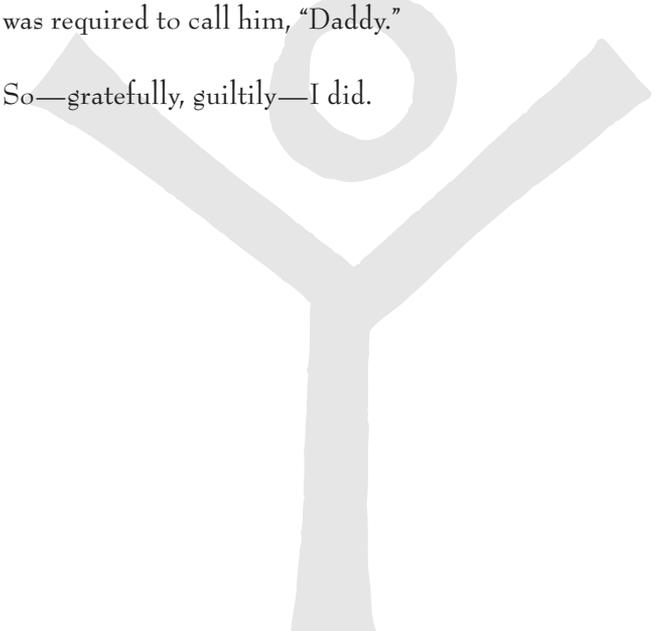
Hours later, when we arrived, the bustle of J.F.K. Airport split me from my negligent escort. All alone, with newborn precision, I pushed through bodies on a foreign walkway, held my toddler-immigrant back as upright as arrogance, stepped as deliberate as martian feet and searched myriad expectant faces for a mother I barely knew.

I had only loved her through scented letters, sent from overseas and read aloud to me by my Papi—who could not join us, who could not fly, who had to adapt to losing love. Twice.

Mommi bellowed my nickname and I replied. Determined stride to frantic pounce. She held me tight. She wore blue silk and smelled of joy. Her kisses pressed my twitching cheek as a man I did not know said, “Welcome home,” words I could not yet decipher.

He was her husband, a citizen. He had sponsored my legal exile, my buried flight, a right reunion. To repay him, I was required to call him, “Daddy.”

So—gratefully, guiltily—I did.



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