

Life Lines

I

Longer than memory, the fingers are silent on the Nazca plains. As the lance-straight lines engraved across the arid seabed to the precise point where day and night keep their balance. White lines carved over and over to call down the inhabitants of heaven: monkey, spider, shaman, whale, or the dark between the stars. Today, an eighteen-wheeler ground the rocks of a monkey's paw to dust, obliterating a mile-long condor's beak, then turned to spit and chew the fragile chalk of a finger that hadn't moved an inch in millennia. The driver with the burnt face said he was looking for a shortcut across the plains. Out of time. Push Replay.

II

In an airless black box in Granada, I still wait for the signal, clutching damp pesetas. The telefonista raises three fingers to say the cable has sparked with a message for me. It waits its turn to move along the ocean floor disturbing the fields of eels, the coupling of giant cephalopods. Along this twisted metal buried in the sand, it moves beneath the notice of killer whales. Soon it will reach the cold black receiver I weigh in my hands, heavy enough to bash a skull. At last the crackle announces the daffodils are up. This is what comes first. And then she says the family dog was crushed beneath a tire. The deep silence tells me whose. Tells me not to follow the line back to any kind of home.

III

I trace figures on the screen of the Pampas
Jumana shot from above. The dog. The scorpion.
The jaguar that must eat a heart each night.
They say you need to climb the red hills
that arc across this windless plain's separation
from the sea to read the lines that loop back
on themselves. With enough time they say
the labyrinth becomes a tree of life
a life line pressed to clay.

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