

THE INDIAN IS PICKING BLACKBERRIES

ISAI AMBROSIO

He arrives early, four tacos wrapped in a plastic bag.
Two white picking buckets fixed to the belt,
he can't save his boots from getting caked with red clay.
In spite of the of the brain-freezing cold,

his chest is as hot as a burning charcoal.
There is no way back. His arms cross.
The small black fruit makes a hiccup sound
bouncing against the bottom of the empty bucket.

In front of him, another worker's hands move
as fast as a harvesting machine, but Javier
can't do that on his first day. He can't stop thinking
of his loved one, his wife, who at this moment

cooks black beans and hand-made
tortillas, but for whom,
if there is no one at the top of that hill pasturing
their five goats or gathering firewood to sell.

She walks along the clear-water creek,
and when she gets to the hill, she remembers
her husband who left for the north. She sits
under the shade of that stout pirul tree and eats
the tacos, so her children won't ask for their dad.

When she sees herself in the mirror, braiding her long black hair
he is behind her. Her eyes shine, his dark body is transparent.
He reaches out, almost tenderly caressing her tanned bare shoulder,
but it is just another small blackberry he pulls

off the vine and gently drops in the white bucket.
She turns around; he is not there. Gently laid out
on bed is the striped white and blue shirt he forgot
to take and she does not want to put away.

KEVIN MILLER



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FEBRUARY

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The twenty-acre field was a dirty mirror of unplanned waterways.
News told "el niño" had hit hard on Watsonville,
Our job was to drain the liquid into nearby roads.
Too much water was no good for the blackberry plants

but it refused to flow out of the rows making my toes
suffocate inside my brown work boots.
The berry plants were not as green as I saw
them in the summer. They were static and dead

as a forgotten black and white photograph.
I didn't see any tender buds, flowers,
or thorny branches and leaves. There wasn't pollen
to harvest or hard-working bees. I thought

I would never see these old plants bloom again,
but that morning there was an orange-colored dawn
in the horizon, no clouds, no birds, just radiation that made
the sky look empty, I had seen that picture before,
the sign that a long season was ahead of us.