

Deborah Diemont

FOOTSTEPS

Guatemala

Transience was my pigmentation. . .

—Graham Greene

i.

Tooled leather sandals,
a souvenir. Slip them on
and your feet burn—
hot cobblestones,
 a street in Antigua.

ii.

City of red-tiled roofs.
Bougainvillea sneaking over walls.
On a patio where you sip black coffee,
the canto of a parrot
with clipped wings.

iii.

Kneel to bargain
with a Quiché girl
whose fingers work needles—
purple-terraced cornfields,
indigo nights, stars
crackling the mountains like bullets.

iv.

Her mother embroiders
the long-tailed red and green quetzal
whose song
before he dives into the forest
is almost a cry.

v.

Lettered above the arch:

No flash. Enter

a Spanish-built church

where a family lights candles to the four directions.

Blood-bone-ocean-sun

melting

 in the walls of painted gold.

vi.

They formed their own Virgin

using Ixchel's heart

 and Mary's skin.

Around your neck

you tie her bronze image

 and rub it like a lamp.

vii.

Ebony Christ of Esquipulas

sleeps in a coffin made of glass.

The meek will cross themselves, blow kisses,

drop a coin into the alms box

at his feet.

viii.

Children's eyes accuse,

You are not hungry.

The youngest follows down the steps

to pinch your belly.

A peso given, three—

 hard pressed to fill an empty space.