

INTERACTIVE FICTION :: EXPATS

The rain leaves birthmarks. It's always midnight in

Dubai

and my grandmother's
ring wasn't mine yet.
It felt wicked:
kissing while the war

flew across the bar like
bad gossip, and later, I
lay flat as a prairie, the
hotel bed white and

endless, and you
quizzed me on Palmyra.
I touched you and it
remade us both:

I my father, and yours,
and the swallow trilling
by the hotel pool.
The tombs burned.

Beirut

where the bartender gaslit
me into showing my
passport, then held it to his
forehead like a fever.

Illinois where, he said.
Akka where, he said. It was

late, the nightclub a siphon
of halos and daughters,

Illinois here, Akka here,
the drive back barely

six miles and the roads
were ropes of ghosts

and the cab driver shook
the war at us like a rose.

Manhattan

the city making a cable
of us like ants

lone and willing

grazed knee on I forget
what and I bleed on

a stranger's fire escape

the drops tickling the
street below and I am

Fatima again Fatima

who forgave the
Americans who named

the birds for me who

said I wouldn't know a
border if I married it.

You must name the country to love it. Every border has a

man

with the voice of an
ocean, nibbling at the
island, his hands
flooding with papers.

Where is your boat,
he asks. Your boat.
Where is. The blue
wrecks into blue.

The line is the size of a
village and he wants to
check your tongue for:
Anthrax. Sores. Father.

You are the naturaliza-
tion of boats and *loz*
pits and maybe if you
crack this horizon open,

green

chair to sit in, my parents
in the courtroom, their

palms over heart, *the flag*,
my heart drawn along like

a wire, *for which it*, there
are cameras afterwards,

Red Lobster biscuits, the
applause a map folded

once too many, a road
trip from *God* to *all*, each

handshake an engine
clacking on. The

neighbors bake a cake,
shape it like a country,

as if to say, *maybe if you*
crack this crust open,

door

and on the other side is
a bright egg

a citizen a shepherd

a country within the
country sleek with

inside the egg is a door

a misheard horoscope
a memory to be docked

to the new trees

enter through the hand
the mother the radio

a floodlight pointed up

maybe if you crack this
glass open,

you'll find a window underneath.