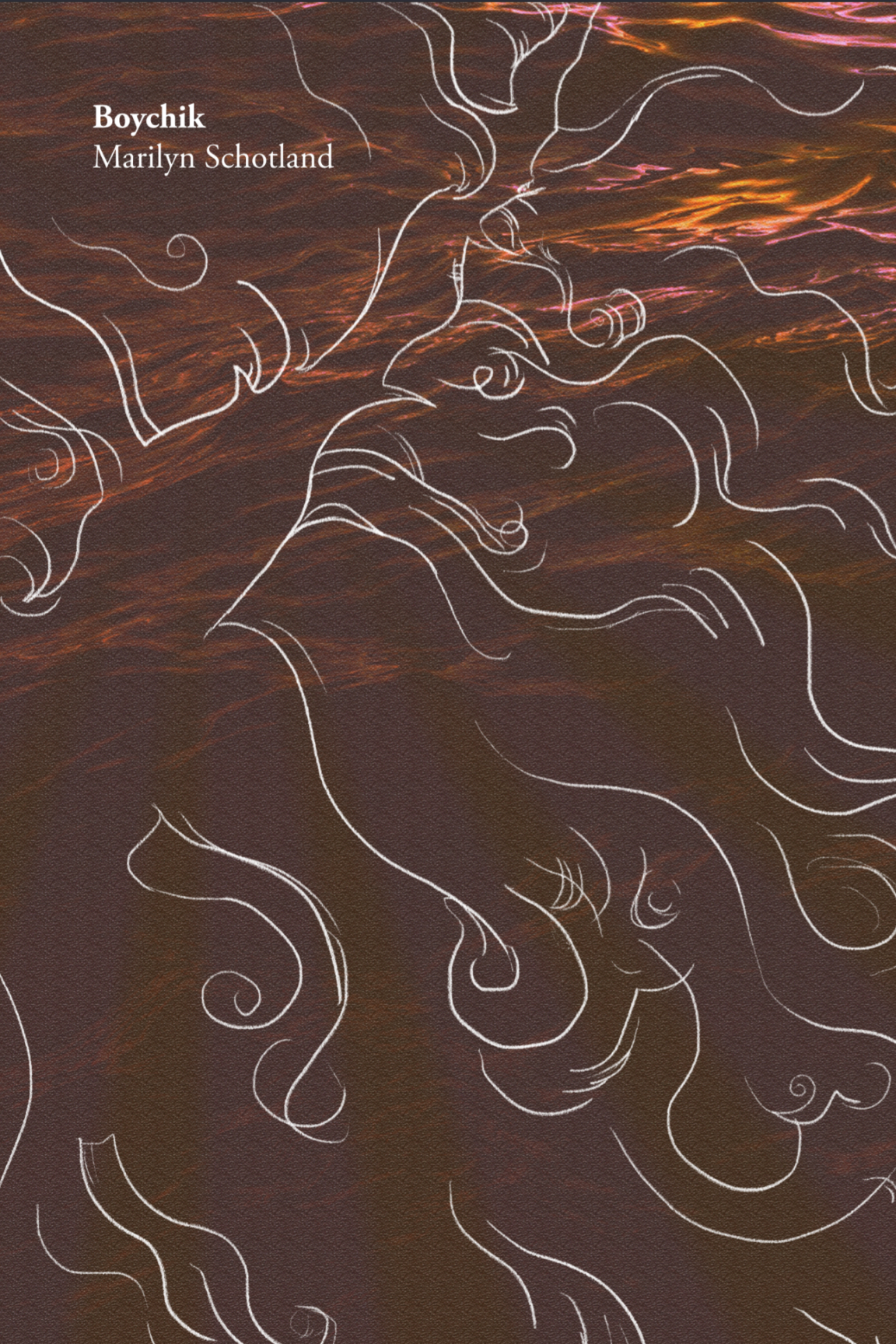


Boychik
Marilyn Schotland



BOYCHIK

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Cover design by Karen Guan



בױטשיק (Boychik): A Yiddish term of endearment for a young boy or man.

Self-Portrait as Bombed Out Synagogue

Mosaic wrist:

gold dappled,
snapped tendons,
firebomb bruises.

Sing

a hymn
to sharpened teeth. Carve

up the things you love

& fill them with shattered glass.

Say

Kaddish for
each mosquito scar & curl
tongue around the verses.

Think

about scurvy & sailors & whip
stitch your skull shut.

Seek forgiveness in fish bones

& aching.

Dig

splinter from rotted fingernail.

Tell

gallbladder to soak up all the greenery before
it vanishes.

Daven darling,

until legs give out.

Sanctify

each migraine until they line the walls

like men waiting to be
shot.

Photograph of my Mother in Havana with Rabbits

Kodachrome: little red skirt,
a frown that I have

plucked

from her face. Rabbits like
baby's breath.

She's not old
enough to
figure out how diaspora cuts
a path across

her
tender
tongue.

1937: it's too early to get to the United States,
so Cuba is temporary. It was never this

warm.

Really, this could have been

anywhere,

but sometimes
I think Havana only exists
in wedding photographs.

& then I remember
that their synagogue was
to show flicks:

seized

a projector where the
chuppah once was.

Unroll the
unroll the

Torah,
screen.

"I heard G-d moved into the movie palace last week."

All this to say,

I share one tongue out
of the four of my grandmother's.

I, waterlogged Hydra: cut off
one more &
brand the stump. I cannot count

how many
I've lost.

I only know
how to speak

in order not to drown.

It's funny, *mi madre* learned
the finer points of English
from the Mickey Mouse Club.

It's been over half a century & still
no promise of return. We cannot

smuggle ourselves back in
the way they smuggled out

my grandfather's
medical school diploma.

Today, my mother sends me a text:
"I miss the rabbits."

No More Laurel Trees Until I Have Evaporated

Mother, I am sorry for
this disturbance, but a wood

woman told me I have not
learned grace-tongue yet,

so she cursed me to abhor
every green thing that

rips
the
earth.

Witch mother,
give me something like

a body. Pretty fused skull,
large hands, & shamed mouth

like Actaeon happening
upon moon-blind Diana.

I'll tell you a secret: he was

happier
with
hooves.

These are the eyes I will
wear when my body turns

against me at the age of
twelve. Mother, I deserve

the same: turn me four legs &
plug me with teeth.

Let
me
fall.

(Trans)versal

I am both kingfisher & fisher king;

sparkling mineral blue wings bruising
the air in rivulets & feet crushed to

ceramic floor. I have moved only in
memory.

The only way to stitch up this body

is with silk – spiders or worms, take
your pick; I have neither. I, with bird

lungs & a royal wound, must figure out
the right way to cut

this damned surgeon's knot.

So if you find the fissure in my spine
where my soul sits, please fill the gaping

cavity with gentle fluttering. Moths
will do; thimble sized reminders to eat

my heart if I don't move fast enough.

I'll knit teeth & flesh together quickly
if you kiss me, golden boy.

There shall be rancor once more upon
this barren lake.

Skipping Pills

Call it migraine mother. Call it something fierce.

I spoke with Death once & she ripped Plague through my skull. Hollowness danced a waltz on my frontal lobe like those girls in Strasbourg in 1518.

She tasted like the sensation of carrying an ember between your teeth & learning how to spit bruised fire; blue & black.

In other words, she tasted like bitterness tempered with a sick sort of delight in familiarity. Pain is a circlet of drums around the temples; a breach of holiness.

*

Call it a legacy of illness. Call it bloodlust.

If you've been in the air long enough, you'll start to wonder if the ground is real. I'm a sky shark, can't stop moving.

I skipped one pill & bled for three weeks straight. No children, but on my walk home during crow-dusk, the graveyard treetops blazed alight with wings. Children of

a thousand high school fantasies spoke madly into the sky. Maybe at some point you should stop taking them. Maybe at some point you should stop.

Sebastian Redux

i.

Arrows & wine. I canonize
with broken skin & liver.

Plague saints. Holy saints.
Gay saints. Saints of saints.

Poor dead, drowned boys:
heads full of flowers & skin.

Half a glass of champagne
stigmata; bloodstream bubbly.

ii.

No angels, so I'll wrestle
some Old Testament G-d.

"This isn't your tradition."
Another one for diaspora.

I tell my friend I'm writing
another poem about (St.) Sebastian.

"I'm Jewish, for Christ's sake!"
"That's the funniest thing you've ever said."

iii.

If I can never be good enough to love,
I've got to find something else to worship.

I can borrow iconography
as retribution for every time

I tried to understand why loving
the thin trickle of hair on a girl's

stomach was frowned upon:
why it was a crime to show affection.

iv.

I dream of a landscape
where no Jewish bodies

burned & no saints were
needed to light the fires.

Sebastian, pour us all
another one; we'll be

feasting on springtime
strawberries tonight.

Boychik

Hollow everything out &
fill it with new bones;
prayers to wax ribs, kisses on collarbones.

Cut hair: let it curl & swim away:
the final heat mangling departing.
Let everything announce the new nervous system,

a conglomeration of fluttering
monarchs, jagged fingernails in gut.
I'll float to the surface & skim myself off the top.

Boychik: the word curls around teeth & clicks through
tongue. An early 2000's boy band patched together:
sk8rboi by way of shtetl.

Half a boy, half a name called girl.
I'm having my ba_ mitzvah at twenty:
there's a first time for everything.

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