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## Dear Champa Dolma

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# DEAR CHAMPA DOLMA,

*By Suzy Bertsche*

I met you in Kibber,  
a cinnamon colored village  
beneath white distended clouds  
on a stucco rough hillside.  
A transatlantic flight to Delhi,  
overnight train north,  
bus to Kaza,  
jeep ride to your blue door.  
You were three, I was eighteen.

A year after spending seven nights  
in a bed facing your cousin,  
I got her letter.  
It didn't start with "Joule"  
or "Namaste,"  
but "Hello."  
She didn't mention you,  
or your swollen-eyed friends  
who played tag around  
the monks' gompa.  
The letter smelled of  
dirt soaked yaks  
your father brought down  
from the hills at dusk,  
stunted purple flowers  
I have long forgotten  
the Spiti name for,  
chai garam that gave me shigella,  
shadowed dust swept away  
by your aunt each morning before  
I woke up to make roti  
and eggs with onions.

I wrote an ode to you.  
I read it aloud only once.

Now that I am not  
acclimated to sleep at 14,000 feet,  
I am nervous it was the lack  
of oxygen that made it sing.  
Every day I wrote a poem  
about your family.  
They are all locked up  
in a thin notebook.

Not one picture of you smiling,  
too smart for my camera,  
always looking past the lens,  
through the pupil,  
to the bone socket.  
Your forehead had more wrinkles  
than your grandma,  
who washed your hair  
in a slice of stream, and  
tried to feed me tsampa  
mixed with chaang.

I tell others of  
your purple sweater,  
plastic pearls, top knot.  
I don't tell them  
your cheeks were rough,  
frayed by the sun  
or that you never  
once looked into my eyes,  
even when your cousin  
had me hold you  
for that picture.

All the best,  
Kalsang/Suzy