

*Poem***Benediction**

In this place  
the small hospital shimmers against the Sierra Madres.  
In this place  
the people have skin the colour of the earth,  
Nightsky hair.

In the cool hallway, a mother carries her child.  
He is wearing white satin,  
gold crosses stitched on the front, the back:  
baby Jesus clothes.

Nuzzling his mother's neck, the boy hides,  
his shock of blond hair skunking  
against her long dark braid

The small mother steps up to the white-coated guide,  
hands over a folded piece of paper  
plucked from between her breasts.

She is not sure where to go.



She hoists the drowsy boy against her shoulder,  
his pink mouth slightly open.  
The guide shows her the line of sea blue  
trailing along the wall

to mark the way.

He lays his hand briefly on the head of the sleeping boy.

*Benediction.*

The mother turns and walks into the shadows,  
the rich white satin on her baby catching dapples  
of stray sunlight.

“Did you notice the blond in his hair?”  
It means he is hungry.  
Hungry to his very bones.

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In the Catholic tradition in Oaxaca, Mexico (and many parts of Latin America) the Fiesta de la Virgen de la Candelaria takes place on February 2 each year. To commemorate the day, forty days after Navidad, when the infant Jesus was taken to the temple for purification, women bring figures of the infant Jesus to local churches to be blessed. These figures are dressed in fine costumes, often regal, costumes fit for a king.