

**Amy Valenzuela****Why it Was a Good Idea**

They name it *Kill the Gays* law  
so you run.

After nights along the border,  
Nairobi looms into view.

The baby comes, displaced  
and perfect, right on time.

She is wet putty  
at first, like the bag of quick cement  
you shouldered on the muddy road to Dabaab.

They wipe her down with hard water,  
leaving fine silt on her blanket, needling  
the words *queer* and *refugee* along its edge  
in invisible ink,  
making the sign of the cross before  
you can roll her to your breast.

The fathers you fled  
call from Kampala,  
wanting to make a claim.  
They seem to say some paths  
can be walked backwards, sounding  
like fingers stretched open,  
like fingers reaching in.

The pronouns are all wrong,  
the connection is bad, even  
in these modern times.

You take the ends of gauze

and swaddle, alarmed at how it can adhere  
like new skin to a wound.

You learn to press the fresh ridges of her lips,  
drawing the tug and suck from her mouth  
and let down the milk of a new country,  
thick and free,  
the only thing that hasn't cost everything  
as your daughter floats in folds of sterile cloth, her face  
open, expectant, alive.

## The Shape of Uncertain Waiting

Lent, and old French hymns decorate  
the hours. These are sad songs, migrating  
sorrow from oud to violin  
in the ancestors of low notes, carrying echoes  
of tabla, dropping among our voices like rain.

At home the garden stirs. Kingbirds fight  
for scraps off the vine. I bruise  
sweet peas urging them  
upward on poles  
trussed with chicken wire

before the heat comes  
and withers their pastel bloom.

Chicken wire. You would never mention this,  
but I have seen photos, how one group  
is kept from another  
in Kakuma camp. Your baby  
reaches through its twisted hexagons

to claw air on the other side.  
You should be in line for food  
but slip past guards and relief workers  
into Nairobi, blue light of the internet café  
stinging your eyes. A few words tapped out

and the same brittle blue

lights up a nightstand across the world.

My job is to be your anchor, your sponsor

when you arrive.

When will you arrive? The days disappear,

are turned back

at the border, money gone,

there never was any money. You ask

do we still want you?

Can I hit reply all,

yes? You are wanted there is a place for you here

don't believe the reports have faith (press send.)

## **Fishing after Dark**

The tourists have gone, filigree  
of hushed voices still frosting the aquaria glass.

A cast whale sways,  
nudging her wire-strung calf

as the air and lights cycle down.

Is it just us, my Piscean sister and me?

The place is ours. Security is off  
tending a reluctant child. We happen

upon the jellyfish, lithe and fragile phantoms  
whose luminous nightgowns billow  
about their faces in manufactured moonlight.

It is quiet now. Do the fish know what time is safe?

A suspicious moray rams the water in front of his grot.

Does our dad still hover inside every space  
we hem with intricate silence?

Does he have to? In the next tank hippocampus,

sea horse. Hello, strange watcher.

Glassy upturned eye, arched and spiny  
mane a curly question mark,

a pearl button sewn inside our middle brains

charting memory, marking a course.

He is so primordial, familiar,  
offspring dangling as crystals  
from coral chandeliers

so not mistaken for scud  
and devoured.

If we had fins, I would dive  
through my sister's recollection,

scrimshaw blade between my teeth  
and trawling the cilia, pluck him out,  
leaving just the jellyish-  
the jellyfish. Blue diaphanous bells,

ghostly girls floating as liquid aura, unencumbered  
electric fingerling tentacles, icy strings  
reaching from their prim garments  
into the groves of night.

## Observation of Beautiful Forms

Our newly widowed neighbor  
is up too early, yard litter  
clinging to the sleeves  
of her mint bathrobe.

She sprays pyrethrin  
around the rims  
of potted leucantha, into spaces  
where the sidewalk has cleaved,

around stakes caging  
her heirloom tomatoes  
marking beds churning  
with daisies, lobelia

and now, pungent marigolds.  
It is too late  
for sleep, the streetlamp  
blinks into my kitchen window

lighting the swarm of ants  
finding work in last night's pan.  
Disturbed they rearrange themselves precisely,  
kaleidoscopically, as a child's toy

turns colored beads inside tiny mirrored coves.  
Such optical delight, to make small rooms  
seem infinite, to conjure whimsy  
inside catacombs of tin.

On Tuesdays, she rises even earlier,  
pumps a stream  
of bug spray around her porch,  
drawing a line between chambered

colony and her front door.

She lifts herself  
into the cab of his old blue Chevy  
before the sweeper comes,

and turns the engine,  
wheeling the truck in a wide arc  
over to our side of the street.