The Intruder

There is an intruder inside me.
She has unpeeled my skin
And crawled inside.
A squatter who refuses eviction.
A home-robber who makes themselves tea.
A conquerer, who stakes in a flag in the country of my body
And names it after herself.

We speak differently.
English rolls smoothly off my conquered tongue,
While the language of my homeland
Quietly drowns in oblivion.
Like roads to an ancient kingdom
Long demolished,
The builders assassinated.

When others speak my dead language,
I am taunted by echoes of a paradise lost.
They reverberate through my mind,
Clashing against the border-walls of my skull,
Reminding me that I can never again belong to my ancestors' clan.

Reminding me
That I am a foreigner in my homeland.

Because there is an intruder inside of me.

My heritage is a lost artifact.
My people's history is a cheap Hollywood film that rejected my audition.
My name feels stolen from others who rightfully deserve it.

I look in the mirror.
Scrutinize my eyebrows, my nose, my cheeks, my skin.
My face should be a map of the country where my ancestors hail.
I grade my features on their ability to reflect the geography of Iran
And always earn an F.

Whose eyes are those in the mirror?
This brown is not the golden brown entitled to children of the Lion and the Sun,

These eyes are nothing more than a picture frame, capturing a pathetic photo of dead soil.

I wonder who this is.
It certainly is not me.
It is the intruder.
A trespasser who I cannot evict.
This American Girl Doll masquerading as a Persian woman.

What does it mean to be Persian anyways?
Is there a measuring cup?
Two tablespoons of Saffron, a quarter cup of Farsi, a splash of caramelized skin, and 3 drops of lion's spirit?
Is this recipe somewhere in the *Shahnameh*, or did it get lost in translation?

One day, I will arrive at the airport and the TSA officer will look at my passport
Then back at me.
At my passport.
Then back at me,
His brow arched in confusion.
"This says you're Iranian. Are you sure about that?" He will ask.
"Of course I am," I reply. "I must be."
"Then why does your passport not match you?"

There is an intruder in me.
She accompanies me to every *mehmooni*, every family gathering, every cultural celebration.
She has stolen my body and engraved her identity over mine.