The Pomegranate Tree

by Elizabeth Martinez 2020

 She would look back to the first time she drove up the circular driveway to the historic house and saw the Pomegranate tree, her favorite fruit. It looked like a symbol of abundance that made her heart jump for joy. It was a sign she believed signaled that she had found her dream house.

 Was it true that every pomegranate had the same number of seeds? Where had she read that each Pomegranate had 613 seeds? Was it an ancient myth? She did remember reading that pomegranates were beneficial to good health, and from the berry family with anti-aging qualities. That sounded great!

 There were other trees and lovely flowers on the property. Olive trees, White Grapefruit, Avocado, Apples, Fig and *Nopales*. Iris with purple and white furry petals, Peonies with single petals, and a tall white Datura night bush. She lived with an abundance of beauty! It was her dream garden.

 The two-story house had been built seventy-five years ago for a wealthy landowner, a doctor. Little else was known about it. Situated on a slope above the Mission, a view of the ocean spoke of a peaceful place. In the style of the era, it had arched floor to ceiling beveled windows, a long sunroom, a tall fireplace, and a detached garage with a little kitchen. The Mexican floor tiles, the 14" lath and plaster walls, and red tile roof spoke of the popular "Spanish architecture." There was a square courtyard with a fountain and koi. It was a perfect house for a lifetime, one she had dreamed about since childhood.

 But it had a two-level basement that seemed out of place in California. As did the little doors throughout the house that opened into empty space. Why was there a hole in the middle of the lower basement? What could it have been used for?

 Twenty years went by fast, and the dream house full of Native and Mexican art was the site of family birthday parties, celebrations and festive holiday events. She knew that some people envied her living there amid the lovely fruit and flower grounds. They didn't know that after twenty years the house would start breathing, the nightmares begin, as if evil was unleashed.

 The evidence was vivid. A murder (oh!) of black crows attacked the side wood doors cawing and scratching them seeming not to stop. The banging on the high windows on rainy nights. At the Halloween party with the crawling fog, a tarot reader and a fortune teller everyone seemed anxious to leave early and she wondered if something scared them? Even the big Wolf dog seemed always on alert, and the cats explored every sound.

Could it be true? Had something or someone provoked or called darkness? What turned her dream house into a house of fear? They sensed the presence and were afraid of the night noises, crying sounds and the cold.

There were brief sightings - of what? Her son stayed over with friends often, her daughter wanted to sleep with her grandmother, and her husband traveled a lot. Everyone found it difficult to sleep. When she slept there were recurring nightmares of a man hurting young women.

 She sought advice from a sensitive friend, someone who could see the invisible. She was told that evil had been disturbed and that she would have to find a way to vanquish it and then leave. She would need to do it alone, not tell her family, and call on the ancestors for guidance. She was told that the menace came from the hole in the second level basement.

 "The hole in the basement?" she asked. It just seemed like someone might have had a post there and removed it. "What else could it be?" Her friend responded, "a remnant from the doctor." Together they went down to the second level and dug. They un-earthed a surgical knife wrapped in linen. It frightened her and she cried.

 On the day of the expulsion, she methodically salted the outside of the house taking special care at the many corners. She sage-ed the inside going from room to room asking for cleansing of negative energy, and glad there weren't any smoke alarms. She walked down to the second level basement and poured Holy water inside the hole and prayed for its victims. She felt safe, accompanied by her ancestors singing around her, grateful for their protection and ancestral wisdom.

 Weeks after it was over, and she was moving out, she remembered the long-ago spring afternoon when she'd first seen the Pomegranate tree at the entrance to the house. As she drove out, she wondered why she hadn't remembered that the Pomegranate also symbolized death, was considered the fruit of the dead and the blood of Adonis. Hadn't Persephone been kidnaped and taken to be the wife of Hades? She was pictured with pomegranates. Why hadn't she remembered that in Greek mythology the Pomegranate was associated with tragedy. It was then that she recalled the dual symbolism of the luscious red fruit, and that the roots, stem and peel of the Pomegranate could be poisonous.

 Sitting in the patio of her new house near the ocean a few months later, she thought back at the last two decades living in the historic dream house and the Pomegranate tree. That life was over, and though friends and family questioned why she had left her dream house so abruptly, she couldn't tell them in detail. She only smiled and said it was time for a new house. Nobody questioned her.

 Now with the ocean breeze coming through the windows in her kitchen, she finished preparing dinner sprinkling Pomegranate seeds on the salad and Enchiladas. She smiled.

Note to herself: Among some early Christians, it is said that the Pomegranate was the representation of Heaven, the promise of eternal life. A royal fruit with 613 seeds. How beautiful.