

# New Poetry by Sara Shea: "Customs"



To U.S. Soil / *image by Amalie Flynn*

Coming through US Customs from Ecuador  
the passport agent asks if I have anything to declare.

I know he doesn't mean the duty free,  
exotic perfume or rare cigars.

He isn't referring to bitter cacao or  
sun-sweetened coffee beans.

Granted, I've stashed a few seeds in my pocket.

Granadilla seeds, wrapped in foil-  
that last snack I ate in the courtyard  
with my grandparents in Guayaquil.

This isn't his concern.

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the passport agent asks if I have anything to declare.

I envision my grandparents sipping sangria  
along El Malecon in the 1940's,  
dreaming of a fortune in rice, bananas, oil-  
running those early tankers through  
the Panama canal. It was a marvel then!  
They were betting on a love that would outlast  
malaria, revolutions, temptations, typhoons.

Coming through the Department of Homeland Security  
from Ecuador, into Miami International Airport,  
the passport agent asks if I have anything to declare.

I should declare the apologies. The explanations.  
The what-if's. The missing photographs.  
The heartaches that have haunted  
my grandparents, their parents, their children.

Coming through customs on to US soil,  
I could declare that the actions and decisions  
of one generation stretch exponentially  
through families for decades to come.  
Instead, I shrug, knowing seeds easily drift  
from their roots in winds of change.

The passport agent asks my reason for travel.  
I reply, "family."  
He nods, calls me an American and  
stamps my passport.