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Where There is Silence There is No Sun

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RIVERSIDE

Where There is Silence There is No Sun

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

in

Creative Writing and Writing for the Performing Arts

by

Ana Renee Reid-Delgadillo

March 2013

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2013

The Thesis of Ana Renee Reid-Delgadillo is approved:

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Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

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who have supported me and believed in me.

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⌘ i. Origenes ⌘

## Surrounding My Birth in Veracruz

I'm sure I heard the plane's roar through my mother's abdomen, hitting my small upside down ears. My parents waved their goodbyes through the coconut palms of Veracruz. My uncle was flying north with the geese. Sometimes I can still feel my head throb where it bumped into the crest of my mother's pelvis, as she got into the car to leave the airport. She was anxious to get home, to get away from the fumes. I ricocheted clumsily within her like a pebble during an earthquake in Oaxaca that marked the day of my birth. The car crossed the city line and headed over the bridge where the Jamapa River's mouth tastes the saltiness of the sea, reaching the road canopied by mango trees, from Tinajas to Tierra Blanca. Oaxaca's only an hour away but still too far from home. My mother crunched up in the back seat felt our connection, a pearl within an oyster in a smoked metal can. A truck passed by as another truck overtook us. Shots broke loose like cannons from the truck, fired at the men fleeing. My legs touched the tip of my nose as my father thrust my mother's head between her knees, all because the poor were just trying to get away from being poor.

My mother says she could feel me searching for an opening so I could see. I wanted to see. I wanted to know. I pushed my head through, opening her womb like a window. My mother still remembers the pain. My father rushed us to the nearest hospital, where seventeen years later I would watch my grandfather die. The hospital floor remembers me. It remembers my father's worried steps, his snake skin boots bruising the linoleum tiles. It remembers the earth shaking...

## After the Eruption of the Popocatepetl

I wait for the bus to arrive  
within the city snowed in by soot,  
and watch the passersby—  
their faces droop, slowly  
wrinkle by wrinkle, land  
on a buildup of worries  
beneath the thickness  
of shadows.

Their faces, *cansados*,  
from waking up to the tired sun  
hidden away  
in an envelope of clouds—  
they can roam the ashen streets  
saturated by rain.

I watch an old woman, *delicada*,  
as old as the street dust reborn each morning,  
with her face crumbling into dry  
specks of skin like crumbs  
from crackers gnawed  
by a teething infant.

I look at my feet,  
sandaled only by threads  
and I don't care, because I,  
must walk  
with my toes within the ashes  
and *mi rostro* facing forwards  
to rebuild myself  
within the remains  
of the air.

## Coming Home from the Post Office in Mexico City

As I'm walking home through a winter haze that covers the city, I watch the people carbon copied into the sky, as they walk in and out of closed doors like forgotten ashes blown with no direction. Their coats mixing together the grays of the streets, the writing on the corner newspaper stand and the only color being the flower shop across the street. Their faces hide between collars lifted to keep them from the cold air, or perhaps to cover the smell of a woman sitting on the sidewalk while a small bundle upon her lap sucks at her breast as she asks for *limosna*, her free hand outstretched. Their faces are pallid children's faces and the wrinkled retirees walk, brittle black and white photos, old daguerreotypes folded away and forgotten within the city walls. A young girl crosses the eight-lane street, following the smell of fresh *tortillas* while she counts the change her mother placed in her hand. The mountains that encircle us, the fog rises from them like smoke from the unceasing fumes of a bus heading to *Ermita* and *Insurgentes*. A child is being taught ambition; his father points to the dreary outdoor shops along the corner, covered by the white steam of the subway vents mixed with the sizzling on a homemade grill. The child listens to the shrill of a *Ruta Verde* subway car screeching to a stop, both only separated by the concrete underneath his feet. His eyes fictions of *pan dulce* with hot chocolate, crumble away like the house he now calls home. I look at my hands, filthy because I can do nothing, because the exhaust of our living, marks me, beneath an unknown sun.

After Reading About Another *Desaparecida* Being Found in Ciudad Juarez

The evening goes silent with the hum of the TV as it cools down. Idalí sits at her computer, as an e-mail from her childhood friend Santiago tells her that another missing girl was found earlier. The girl's parents had been searching for two months.

Idalí assumes that someone out there is searching for her, his right hand a compass twirling East to West, North to South, perhaps one day through the hallway to the kitchen where night tries to peer through a vase on the ledge with its wilted Marigolds hanging over, their petals dripping into an empty Tequila glass, lemon rind in the sink.

Five years ago Idalí fit the mold, young and naive as she walked home from school, but now the scars remain as she rebuilds her limbs from resin, her heart, punctured lungs are pieced together within the polymer clay like broken porcelain. But now another young girl from Ciudad Juarez, whose raped, dismembered parts are pecked away by vultures, as the same man prowls outside a school on the corner of *la Calle Mina* and *la Calle La Paz*, a Cuban cigar in one hand, and Bacardi filled flask in the other. Idalí remembers the scent, one that once held warm memories of sitting in her *Abuelo's* lap.

Idalí has known the night,  
the moon faded into a muddled glow.  
She knows the carnal act that makes its bed in lonely  
cots, puke covered sheets from drunken nights,  
beds made of cardboard with blood seeping through  
to the concrete, mixing with the border dust of *Rios de Tijuana*.  
She has made her bed, its superficial wrinkles, a lazy tabby  
laying at its center, a wine glass of L.A. Cetto's Cabernet  
tipped over onto my pillow. She watches as the wine reaches  
each corner, turning into a crimson hued canvas.  
The corners of the bottom sheet unravels, as she unravels  
from her clothes, peels them away like the memory

of crawling through the heat, her own clothes ripped, she,  
one of the very few who have survived the killings,  
Juarez now called *The Serial Killer's Playground* has claimed  
another, the girl so disfigured she could only be identified  
by the pink streak in her hair that her mother helped her dye.

Here in Tijuana there is no killer, the only voyeur, a cat  
as it stretches out her paws to cleanse away the evidence  
of the finch in the closet. But Idalí searches, and searches  
for courage to walk on, beyond this desert hydrated by blood,  
to walk on her own two feet, a woman from Juarez,  
who risks being stepped on as her voice needs to change  
so that their deaths may be heard, as Mothers continue to search  
for their daughters' laughter finding justice in the night.



The City as Hell  
*after Kees*

*Is it bad to live without a hell:  
can we not just rebuild it?  
Neruda*

For those whose factory walls are covered by the grey tinge of oil  
used on the conveyor belts.  
For those who thought of death, but found life in the light  
of an orphan child's toothless smile.  
For those women who had to walk through the streets of Juarez with fear,  
of death and torture weighing them down  
like the Volkswagon parts they help produce.

In the cold winter mornings

the stoves are warming porridge for the sons and daughters before they go to work at the  
Nike assembly line. Slits in the metal walls hold the heat in from laborers as they put  
together another pair of Jordans. Wires buzz and stretch as women chat about the goings  
on, the neighbor's daughter has disappeared just days after her sister's naked body was  
found mutilated under the desert sun.

There is no stillness in this brisk, clear winter day,  
there is only a Sun whose warmth chills the bones,  
and somewhere else in Mexico the ocean stirs,  
an old man walks with his fishing pole, not knowing if he'll catch enough to feed him  
and his dog.

Upon these hills there is a different type of war, one played in the desert  
outside of Juarez, a serial killer's playground as it is called,  
here is mourning.

What if we could rebuild hell, should we ruin this?

## Letter to Juan During the Carnival in Boca del Río, Veracruz

*Ayer mire una sirena*, yes Juan a mermaid. She was a young girl, maybe as old as Marisol would be today. She looked just like her. *Ojos tristes*, sad like the motions of the waves when the day is calm, you know the way it is right before a storm hits the bahía. She looked around at everyone from the top of her float, searching. You know Juan I wished she was searching for me through the crowd. I wished her eyes stopped and found mine on the other side of the *bacalaos* and other fish that were made of cardboard, which hung from blue threads around her. At moments I felt her call me, reach for me the way she did when she just needed a hug. But she was only throwing candy out to the children.

Juan do you think Marisol is now a mermaid? *El comisario* said her body never made it to shore. Do you think so? Her young legs molded together inside new scaled skin. Oh Juan, I can see her with shells adorning her hair. Her hair black like the *petróleo* they drill out in *Coatzacoalcos*, where you used to work.

I remember the day you came home and Mari was sitting outside playing house with doña Conchita's daughter Isabel, Chabe she called her. You arrived and she jumped up with that big mango covered smile of hers and ran to greet you. I remember you stopped and watched her, your arms at your side while hers barely even made it halfway around you. *Aye* Juan, I remember. I remember many things. I remember each wave that's passed since she disappeared, and I can almost here her voice singing beneath the water's surface, as she swam away from the mouth within the darkness...

## Pablo Descending

His mother cries seawards  
to God, to angels swimming intricate  
circles around the fish. She asks the sun  
to turn back its fiery hands  
and bring her boy back to this world.  
His name, now, a pebble thrown  
across the page, a ripple  
left behind to celebrate his life  
in Boca del Río, Veracruz.  
Other names rest next to his,  
sons and daughters lost at sea, in war.

*Madrecita*, you held your son so close,  
your tears, thorns, I can't just brush away.  
Pablo's body rests below the sea,  
his hair a place where sea horses rest.  
*No llores*, you did not send him to die,  
he was for a time, fearless in his uniform,  
but now he breathes in the kelp, salt,  
within the caves that were his eyes.  
Don't cry, he's at home beneath the waves  
that erode his mouth, now he speaks  
to the fish with their fins stretched out, so wide.

## Overlooking the Seaport

Wait a while,  
as the coffee brews  
and fills the air,  
a bitter awakening.  
From here, you  
can see the marketplace,  
a woman carries her basket  
of fish and vegetables,  
while the rich sail by,  
their sails a bright yellow  
contrasting the drab grays  
of a poor city.

Outside, workers leave the factory  
lines, covered with the sadness  
of concrete, to go back to  
their cardboard homes,  
where seagulls complain,  
as an old man sits under  
the shadows of the rich  
hotels, his hand reaching,  
waiting for pity.

Come sit with me,  
rid yourself of shoes, of socks,  
walk in your pale skin,  
let your toes sift through  
the sand as it brings you  
closer to the sun. Forget  
the ache of how much it costs,  
the rich, the poor and their  
separate seas, just return  
home to the quiet of day.

## Broken Down Car

Hunk of metal sitting there,  
blue paint chipping  
around each headlight.

That's the  
va-va-voom  
of time caught  
in a can of frijoles  
that doesn't run.

The spin cycle of the engine  
silent in the night,  
sweet tomb,  
of old ghosts chilling by its side.

Where light scuffs the scars  
left by the kids who've used it  
for batting practice.  
Imagine the crash  
of broken mirrors  
along the ground, ready  
to be stepped on by my shoeless feet.  
My toes mix  
grease and dirt,  
oil and white vinegar skin.  
I see that white, indigo mottled  
can that took my uncle to his grave.

## Eyes Beneath the Earth

I assume that later on in death, I will grow tired  
of my hair and nails growing, even while no breath  
escapes my lungs, rotted until there's nothing,  
but the shady remains of dust.  
I assume, I will grow tired,  
wandering through the cemetery, while a chorus sings  
the song of *la calaca* and dance to the rhythm  
of skeletons playing out the stories of the dead.  
It seems that now in life my bones move to shadows—  
my ligaments, just rubber bands held together  
by my thinning skin. I tire of the sun outside  
my window, shining on top my hair.  
I'm tired of the smell of rain that never comes,  
of dirt, dry as my skin rubbed away by my fingers  
after digging out a wilted cactus, agitated  
like my mind after watching a child hang up  
tattered clothes to dry, while he wears nothing.  
On the streets, parakeets sing a final song  
of silence, their cage doors open  
but their feathers gone, blown into the wind,  
their bodies lay plucked, while an *anciana*  
hides her face behind a black veil  
as she cries because of their death,  
but never buries them.

I no longer walk those streets each day,  
I just want to see the brightness of night,  
with eyes of an owl pulling out a rodents intestines,  
gray, black mixed with the yellow kernels  
of eaten corn from some nearby barn.  
That's why my feet no longer touch concrete—  
shoes off, buried underneath the crops,  
I've planted my heart within the maize,  
my nose, cut and planted below the sugarcanes  
so that I can only smell sweetness,  
my ears listen to the earthworms sleeping,  
my eyes burning in the thousand suns  
of marigold.

## The Old Mango Tree

I was seven when my *Abuelo's*  
white Dodge Dart-k, weaved  
along carefully through  
the beat-up road  
    part dirt,  
        part loose gravel,  
            and part cheap tar.

The road an expense  
el Centro Municipal ignored  
having more important things –  
their ranch style homes, kids' private education,  
or the *cervezas* and prize cows they'd butcher  
to bribe the people to vote for them again.  
I stared out  
    beyond the road,  
        beyond the jungle,  
between me and *Temascal*,  
as my heartbeats quickened,  
like skipping stones  
across *el Rio Papaloapan*.

I watched the thunderclouds  
gather like the poor around the pit,  
their prized meal being prepared.  
Below the clouds, I could just see  
    a tall mango tree,  
        as lightning struck  
its core, and split it in half.

Half its trunk,  
branches full of ripe fruit  
fell and landed on an old thatched house,  
where my *Bisabuela* sat unknowingly –  
her leg severed, but her life spared  
for five more years.

Under a roof made of *aluminio*  
my dad gathered to patch up  
the once palm leaf thatch,  
my *Bisabuela* sat in her wheelchair,  
as disease crept up her leg,  
as it did through the town  
and together turn to ash.



## Nostalgia

I imagine the coconut palms sway with a calculated dignity to the *Norte's danzón*, like an elderly couple dancing in the *Malecón* on a humid Sunday evening. The rain pours needles down my face like my *Abuelita Tules'* sadness every time we leave. *Feliz Navidad* is no longer happy, one by one, ten children return to their homes. *El Año Nuevo* becomes another old sock that *Doña Tules* doesn't need to mend. I imagine her heart beating as she stands next to the ocean, each wave washes away a memory for her, but they remain deep inside her like children running circles around her temples, underneath gray hair, and beyond her seaweed eyes. I can almost hear her faint voice in the wind as it talks to my grandfather's memory, as if he were there standing with his feet buried in the sand, the ocean calling him as well to come home. But soon her voice fades away like Veracruz, as the plane takes off, my toes like its wings leaving swirls in a pool of clouds.

*El Sudor de las Naranjas*

The sweat from the oranges  
runs along my arms—  
I'm reaching for suns  
growing in the green leafed sky.  
A warm, humid breeze  
blows across the salty beads  
as they make their way  
down the sides of my face,  
escaping from the noose  
of my braided hair.

Somewhere,  
there are lilies  
    lounging  
on russet waves  
    of sunset.

Here,  
the sun beats  
its heated rhythm  
on our bodies working  
through twelve hours  
of exhausted daylight—  
We're wrung like rags  
releasing the remaining  
moisture from my skin.

*Mi cara,*  
my face curved  
with my nose at its  
center, smelling  
the few lingering  
citrus blooms, an essence  
reminding us of the cool  
mornings in the Spring,  
watching the humming birds  
drink of the flowers' hearts.

*Mi piel,*  
darkly tanned,  
skin roasted in the sun,  
turning into the coarse  
texture of an orange peel.  
My brow's soaked  
the dew bleeds  
from my fingers,  
finding it's way  
into the soul's orchard.

## Catfish Acres

As a child, I woke to cows calling out like roosters and my mother leaving me to sleep until the heat poured in through my window, igniting my young stubby fingers. In the farm next to ours, my friend Sophie woke up to feed the chickens, walked over to the pigpen and dumped last night's dinner for their breakfast. I didn't have to do that at our farm, our abnormal farm where the animals didn't have fur or even feathers but had slick bodies, covered in slime. Fish grew through acres of water, square ponds dug into the soil with their muddy bottoms that would stick between my toes and made me squirm. I would go out to meet my mother, as she collected the newborn eggs hidden in the rusted oilcan motels, held them gently in her palms and then placed them in a bucket floating by. I jumped in the water, felt the mush seep through the bottoms of my feet like the slimy skin of a snail. Whiskered silver bullets stared at me, then turned to watch my mother steal their children, moving their tails back and forth to the rhythm of some Arkansas blues song that only they could hear. I looked at my mom and watched those tiny circles, transparent white shells plastically stuck together, some were translucent enough to see small black dots for eyes already formed that looked out and said goodbye. I was jealous of this finned unborn offspring that stole my mother's attention from me, her daughter that only wished to grow scales and swim around her feet, tickling her calves until she laughed and looked at her with motherly blue eyes. But my skin kept the pink wrinkled texture of a fish made for land, with legs instead of a tail and arms as fins. So, I turned from my busy mother, looked up to the sky and watched as animals floated by with their white puffy tails chasing the sun.

Fifteen years later, I stood before a glass acre pond crammed into a shallow market place in Chinatown, where merchants were selling their farm-raised fish. I stared across the fish laid out on tables, cold with death, their heads chopped off and their insides exposed. On the other side I found the same whiskered catfish from my youth as they looked at me through their glass cell while swinging their tails to an unheard creole tune, the sadness in their eyes, trance like, resembled those within their filmy plastic eggshells, black points watched me, took me back to the incubated life stolen from us, past days of swimming in obscure pond water rustled by our stems; taken away by larger hands from my mother's warm touch like the rays of sun through my childhood window, away from the time when my mother would leave me only to look up at the sky in a childish daze watching the clouds drift by like days.

## Of Fathers, Daughters and Guns

### I. Courage

At five years-old a child disappears in a field of sugar cane. She walks away persistent, each step too small to be heard through the sway of the tall green stems. All that could be heard behind her was her mother and father bickering over whose fault it was that the truck got stuck in the mud. They're not aware of her walking away or that little by little her small frame blends into the field. They only notice each others shouts, ricocheting between the avocado trees and the sugar cane. It doesn't bother the girl; she's grown used to their arguments as if they were the walls she slept in. Her *abuelo* notices her absence, but never saw her leave and is left to watch the tall reeds sway to the music of her steps as she walks through them. He doesn't go after her, he doesn't have to.

He always believed her to be braver than her mother, braver than any man he's met. "*Naciste curiosa,*" he once told her, "You've given your mamá trouble since the day you pushed your way out of her."

Fifteen minutes pass and the *abuelo* watches his daughter and her gringo husband start to fight over who lost his granddaughter. From a distance he hears a small squeak of a voice calling out, then the canes move, this time in a waltz instead of the simple ballerina solo she caused earlier.

"*Por aquí, están por aquí,*" the child's voice floats above the tall canes. "Come on this way, the truck's this way," it starts again. Little by little he watches as she gets closer, behind her like an army in tattered clothes are around fifteen boys that he'll later find out she ran to get from the orphanage they had passed earlier.

"*Alla esta tu hija,* and look, who she has coming with her." He yells back at her daughter. She stares, wide-mouth at her daughter while the gringo laughs at the sight of his light skin general leading her troop.

At five she knew she was strong, she was invincible, and it's what comes with the innocence of that age.

### II. The Birthday News

I listen to the silence that follows gunshots fired a few blocks away from Oak St. Even though I'm outside, so close to death, my heart doesn't cringe. It just takes in the news about my father, and my father's voice breaks on the other side of the receiver. "Cancer," his voice resonates in between each heartbeat. Behind me I can see my daughter through the screen door playing house with my best friend's niece. Death has never scared me, after twenty-six years it has never fazed me, until now.

It's not the presence of bullets scattered by whatever gang it may be that scares me. Gunshots never scare me. I was born to them twenty-six years ago, today. They are what led me to hurry up and push out of my mother's womb, gunshots were a common song while growing up to my father's firearms as he went hunting, shot at stray rattlers or when he just practiced in the backyard. But now the man who protected his wife and unborn child has met his match, and it's one that a bullet can't stop.

I sit there on the concrete steps while the smoke from my clove cigarette seeps through my own lungs. Until now I had hoped the only death my daughter would know was my own, but now I don't even want that. Even with the distance between my father and me. I can still feel his absence if he were to die and I wouldn't want that for her. I stare at the smoke exhaled from my lips, my nose and follow it to the sky and watch it dissipate into a missing constellation in the distance. The Pleiades Cluster covered by a passing jet heading for LAX.

### III. The Airport

I now have my own six year old to walk through the tall reeds to fetch for help. But there is no mud this time and the jungle's changed, from the tropics into the smell of smog and airplane fumes. We wait for our flight. I stare out as people loiter at the bar next to gate 7C, LAX empty for it being so close to Spring Break. A man takes a swig from his Whiskey. His eyes troubled, by what I don't know, and I don't want to assume. Yet, he looks like a man that has laughed many times; the wrinkles under his eyes tell me as much. Those same wrinkles remind me of my father.

I turn my head, and search beyond the little redhead at the window, past the plane from Aero México landing, and past the AA taking off. I take off without them. My heart skips through time zones, and I hold my breath. I'm not flying North with the geese like my uncle on the day I was born. I'm heading east to see my father dying.

Next to me my daughter sits coloring. I wonder if she will love her grandfather the way I loved mine. Will she miss him when he is gone? I look back and remember when I visited *mi abuelo* at the hospital. My grandmother sat next to me, praying that he would get through like he always did. "*Puedo verlo?*" I asked her. She looked at me, her green, tear-deepened eyes shining, warm like the tropics outside. I remember the question in her eyes, but she nodded and told me he would want to see me. "*Tu eres su nieta favorita, entra.*" His favorite... I stood up, opened the door and saw him there dying on the bed, so pale like coconut meat. I remember his breathing, as the electro cardio machine beeped steady. He turned his head, and my heart stopped. The ECM beating faster when he saw me, I ran out. I was young, so I ran, to save him to not worry him. My mother and I left, five days before he died. I wonder if he still thinks I'm brave. Inside I can almost hear him tell me that I am, "*Porque estoy contigo.*" And he is always with me. Will my own father be there for her?

#### IV. The Father and the Gun

*Never point the gun at anyone, you understand?* He looks at you, eyes serious, before holding the small b-b gun out towards you. His father gave it to him when he was a boy and now, like tradition, he gives it to you. *And please don't go pointing that thing in the house or it'll be both our heads if your mother catches you. It's bad enough she's mad at me for giving it to you. Girls don't use guns. Bull crap. Just follow what I say and we'll be fine.* He ends with a smile that makes you forget the man you hate. The one you'll come to find out held a gun to your mom's temple when you were only a year old, him too drunk to recognize it was her. You take the gun and chase after every animal you can imagine, a hunter, like your father, after the game. Later you'll realize that the gun shoots nothing but air. But it doesn't matter. You're still his Calamity Jane.

## Elegy to the Soft Snap of Bones

### I

My father arrived home drunk again, his temper ready to strike like a Rattler hidden in the thistle berry bushes behind our house. I stayed in my room, I tried to cover my mom's yells with images of Sunday mornings; my father cooking pancakes, fluffy scrambled eggs, my mom gone to church. I wished I were running through the woods, lost, as the house became silent; the only sounds, the rolling snores of a drunken man, asleep with . My mom came to my door and opened it with tear-stained eyes, now more hazel than the shallow parts of a nearby catfish pond, she grabbed my bag and filled it with clothes and asked me not to ask. What would a nine-year-old know? I decided to stay quiet. I followed, and climbed into our beaten up Chevy and watched her stop to breathe. Her mind set and her tears gone beyond the winding road, as she drove us away.

### II

The white tail doe ran out from behind the great White Firs, her sweat covered limbs reached for distance and ran straight through the branches with the hidden sun, she crossed a pastel clearing of yellow-white pansy trails damp with the sky reflecting of the dew from the chill night. Almost as if lost with no end, a road snaked ahead, hidden beyond the dirt slope, with its long tar-black body and tire marked scales stretched into the trees, like camouflage.

### III

Fragments shattered with the impact of two bodies, chrome – bumper, the soft snap of bones. It was almost as if God had pressed fast-forward, and seconds flew by like the splintered glass from the passenger side headlights. The old Chevy, dented further by the new reminders of paint-chipped patches on its face as the doe's torso landed on the hood, her hooves tapping the windshield. My mother broke, her restraint sprung into a fresh batch of tears, the collision bumped aside hopes that god would make him stop drinking, give her the strength to finally get away. She looked over at me, watched me stare into the doe's eyes that once were liquid brown marbles as they faded slowly into a lifeless quartz. As I watched her die I turned to my mother asking "Why?" She didn't know. She watched those same eyes as they passed on. "Mama, I'm ok," I looked up at her. She smiled, the regret still there. I was safe, that's all that mattered, she looked back at death as it lay there in the middle of the road, took my hand and we waited in silence; breathing.



For Elena after Losing Her Baby Two Days before My Daughter was Born

The sky's unclear within its grayness,  
the sirens from the ambulance  
smear color to a cool winter's night.

On the fifth floor Elena sleeps,  
with the paleness of her  
skin indistinguishable  
from her hospital gown.

She opens her eyes,  
looks around for her husband,  
who stayed by her  
during delivery;  
she searches for the light  
within his eyes, but finds  
nothing but the gray walls.

Over the hospital,  
a winter breeze sighs,  
souls are carried on it,  
caught like pigeon feathers  
in the wind—  
her baby boy,  
flies away to the angels.

\*

Only pain  
revolves within  
the hollow center  
of her stomach

lifeless  
a shattered  
eggshell

her hands  
an empty basinet  
welcoming no one

\*

Elena,  
my body lays here, waiting,  
muscles contracting,  
my pelvis opens,  
a bulb with no petals.

Only two days ago,  
you were here,  
though you remember it  
like the owl  
remembers, to wake  
and hunt at night.

You resent me.  
I know, it's as if  
our bodies open together,

you search your abdomen  
with your palm,  
each contraction relived  
as if you can feel me  
give birth,

even when, from your  
body, there came only  
nine months of death.

\*

Somewhere,  
beyond the side of the river,  
there must be a creek

where children bathe  
while their mothers  
wait to give birth to them.

Time soars by,  
a grain of rice,

trapped inside  
the beak of a pigeon  
as it passes overhead,

speckled white wings  
within the dim auroras  
of sunset.

## Waiting on a Rainy Desert Night

Only the rain listens to me.  
Each drop places its ear  
against the roof until it seeps  
    into deep.  
I'm happiest when I'm alone.  
Outside the heat settles  
to a musky fog on my window,  
warmth continues inside,  
my breath making love  
to it. I hear my daughter cry  
in the next room— my heart  
surrenders, I'm crushed.  
Silence is broken like water  
glasses as my daughter took  
her first steps, I think of how  
much she means to me,  
cherished as a coyote's song at night,  
absent in the rain. She's as dear  
as the prickly cacti  
filled with water  
that never burst.  
It seems that disappointment  
has had me trip so many times  
over my own two feet, and yet  
my clumsiness continues to grow  
with age, but I don't know.  
I don't know!  
What excuse will I have  
the next time?  
But does it really matter?  
Does it matter  
that only raindrops  
hear the coyote's chant,  
where I sit waiting  
for the tranquility of the night.  
Only the rain listens,  
each drop absorbing  
    what I say.

*Escuchando las Noticias*

I sit and listen to the news,  
a child falls beneath the rubble  
of his father's fist and dies,  
while another child drowns  
as her mother attempts to save her  
from the floods, but does anyone  
do anything? Do I?  
Have I sat so long in front of a screen  
that it seems that I don't care?  
Have I gouged *la verdad*  
from my eyes so that I only see  
what is easiest to see, a solitary daisy  
in the cracked vase my daughter painted,  
a pink heart with *mamí* misspelled at its center  
or her cat asleep across the clean laundry.  
Do we veil our eyes from what's around us?  
*Esperamos el sol*, when there is no sun.  
Death and laundry detergent  
intrude on our lives equally through the TV set,  
as children walk through the streets  
with handguns, *sin sus madres*,  
as a baby rots in a trash can,  
no one around to bury him.

And I wait, *mis manos llenas de tierra*,  
and there's no soap to wash away  
the dirt from my hands,  
to take off this veil  
that lets me forget who I am,  
where I came from,  
and the water that is our blood

## My Daughter Introduced to Death

My fingers trace the lifeline across my palm as I look up and notice the vase my daughter made for me as it rests in the center of the table. Inside it, the pink and violet gerberas smother the white daffodil she picked for me in the back yard, but soon they'll wither.

The vase's frame is a tan-yolk color, smooth, with red featherlike brush strokes along terracotta curves. At its center is a small brown bird, its wings spread out as if in flight, even if it was childishly painted— it remains lifeless.

It reminds me of a Hoary Redpoll. The bird's small brown body caught in my aunt's windowpane, his ruby forehead pressed against the glass, so close I could see his eyes stare blankly at the sky. Maybe we all die trapped somewhere, so unlike the redpoll, with its pale pink breast feathers smooth against its torso.

My daughter asked, "Why did it die *mami*?" I couldn't answer her.

## Gold Fish

Once my daughter  
wanted to flush a live fish  
down the toilet, after she watched me  
flush its bowl mate, its golden body  
stiffly swimming through chlorine blue.  
She asked me why, I looked at her,  
she watched as the tail disappeared.  
I told her it was going home,  
the sea at the other side  
of the wall.

She then ran off, her steps  
side-stepping the cat  
as she went to get the other goldfish,  
“she needs to go with him,”  
she yelled “she’ll get lonely.”  
The gold fish died  
the next day.

Maybe she was right.  
Maybe in her loneliness she died.  
Maybe the sea is what she searched for.  
Maybe I should have listened to my daughter.

Of Marriage

*What are cyclons called  
when they no longer move?*

*Neruda*

Do you think two people can meet like a rainstorm? Whose unleashed tension makes their souls run together like crabs within one shell? A honeymoon uniting them hip-to-hip, moving them to the rhythm of one solitary shadow afloat in candlelight. Meanwhile, the cold stays outside.

Do you think though time passes in silence like a lonely vagabond, it gets jealous? Will it just let that rainstorm remain as passionate as when it had begun, instead of fading back into the sea? Summer's honey cooled down to a simmer causing waves of lust to stall like glass.

Do you think we've reached the point where days pass, and we no longer wake in each other's arms? Where our backs never feel the naked sky, they've become accustomed to a sanctuary built over time to a flat understanding beneath gray skies we cannot see beyond.



After Having a Huge Argument about my Daughter with My Ex-husband in Front of  
Saint Christopher's Congregation

You continue to age like water,  
retain the moisture of your skin,  
even the ripples of hair along your arm  
remain like grass beneath the fallen snow.

β ii. Oscuridad Ɔ

## Thanksgiving

Morning, and my head pinwheels. How I wish I could evaporate like steam after a shower, but instead I like water particles on the window... A bird sits at a branch ruffling its feathers; the wind scatters brown and yellow leaves across the roof, and my reflection looks back at me.

What is it I should be thankful for? The scent of pies baking in Mamo Reid's oven? But now, there is no one to bake them, there is no family to surround me. I chose to be alone. I can be grateful for the silence; there are no voices, no ghosts in the air; just the hum of the heater at my feet its comforting warmth. Around me, student work to be graded, my computer taking in my thoughts and the movie murmuring in the background, like a life, whose plot I almost recall, whose ending is unpredictable... unappreciated.

## While Teaching

*¿Si he muerto y no me he dado cuenta  
a quién le pregunto la hora?  
Pablo Neruda*

Who will I ask for the time when I die?  
When in life, I never take into account  
the constant dance that the hands of an old clock make.

My existence has been to look at my watch,  
and wait for conclusions: the end of class,  
my foodless lunch break, or for the pain  
in my stomach when something is wrong.

Who will I ask for the time,  
when I have died, how would I know  
when at times I feel that I am

in a class of ghosts?  
Each child vacant, lost.

Time is just a composition I've lived by,  
and hardly listened to until

the final bell rings.

## Waking to Candlelight

My eyelids move to the whispers  
of a burning candle, lit for prayer,  
its pale glow reflecting  
on the ceiling— an orange halo  
through the curtain of skin  
above the young Virgin's image.  
My eyes open, sleep fades away  
like an ocean wave after it breaks.  
I can feel my heart beating  
in circles, cycles  
of one...  
two...  
three beats...

I feel the absence of love,  
a predator within each beat,  
a great white shark searching  
for prey, a scent of blood.  
From somewhere in the kitchen  
I can hear my aunt's parakeets take flight  
as if they sense my continual search.  
I close my eyes as I hear her soothing  
the rainbow of fluttering feathers.  
I close my eyes to the shushing  
of my heart, to a far off flicker  
of a new sun within the darkness  
of the television screen.

## Envious of the Sun

The steeple points its finger to the sky  
calling out, inside children shower churchgoers  
with their songs of prayer.

I step outside, thinking of my closeness to God,  
invited to sit in his house for tea and biscuits,  
while the sun only peeks through stained glass windows.  
I sit at a nearby bench, a dull gray stone polished  
into the cool, smooth marble beneath me.  
I look up at the sky, envious of the warm orb at its center.

Church has never been my home, it's always been a destination  
imposed by my mother, her ambitions to go to heaven.  
I wish my skin cells would break apart like petals,  
blow away in the softness of a passing breeze,  
but they're trapped with blood flowing through them,  
a river that can never be tamed, nor dammed,  
but at times grow clotted beneath my skin, purple bruises.  
I wish I were something else, but here I sit, a spirit  
having tea with God. While, I wish I were the sun  
as it stares down, a dream burns inside me,  
of flying away as a pigeon does  
when a child runs towards it,  
disappearing into the light of day.

## A Lover Who Will Never Bloom

He wakes up next to me,  
his breathing in tune  
with my lungs,  
somewhere near them  
awaits my heart, beating  
to the lost tune of sleep,  
    palpitating,  
only because it has too.  
I assume he watches  
me sleep, I can feel his eyes  
looking through closed eyelids  
for blue irises, lost  
searching inwards  
towards my mind  
that reels each dream an old  
black and white movie,  
the dame is caught, no escape,  
where I'm a cat that jumps off  
the roof, and still lands on all fours.  
I can almost see him look at me,  
As he tries to find a peephole  
so he can see my dreams,  
    the happy ones  
that wake him in the night  
with my laughter.  
He asked me once  
if I ever dreamt of being  
something more than what I am.  
I looked at him,  
but saw beyond his shoulder,  
beyond him to a robin singing,  
free to take flight  
in the blue contrast of the sky,  
as if it were a red  
kite with no strings pulling her down,  
and beyond to a cape honeysuckle,  
with its fire-like flowers  
in the late of summer,  
that have yet to bloom.

## One Night Stand

The curtains drawn, the once swept floor, cluttered  
from the rush, clothes discarded everywhere,  
thrown about the corners of my cherry oak bed.  
There, through the bedroom, a nude shadow crept,  
leaning, hovering, watching, as I pretend to sleep.  
“I’ll call you tomorrow,” a whisper turning away,  
silence follows, unheard I curled up spent.

The absence of touch is more tangible than perverse smile,  
soft arms are not here anymore to mold me, to hide my face  
in a kiss or rustle the lilac sheets that once covered us.  
Another lover lost in the midst of sex, I dream  
of some warmth next to me, though I remain here cold.



## Afternoon Nap

Sunlight flickers through the curtains,  
and finds me asleep at my desk,  
a forgotten pen tattooing my right arm  
every time I move,  
but I don't feel it.

Arms numb,  
slumped under  
the weight of my head,  
I don't feel the sunlight  
look over my shoulders.  
It stares at the fuzzy writing  
on cream colored sheets, etched  
deeply by the forgotten pen.

I've lost myself,  
my lungs burn,  
my breath breaks  
into the beats of water hitting  
the grass when it rains.  
Smoke slithers through my teeth,  
fading back into a box  
of un-smoked Marlboro Lights.

My dreams run circles  
between my temples,  
united with the moon  
my eyes feel the polar numbness  
of my fingers, my ears  
only hear the whispers  
of my thoughts,  
like random rustling leaves.

My nose smells the burnt  
scent of cigarette butts in an ashtray,  
but it doesn't recognize it.  
It doesn't want to,  
and my mind is left  
to show the empty road  
of sleep to the sun.

## Self

This morning the fog rose  
where the sun should have been,  
leaving me to wake up  
in no mood for anything  
but more sleep.

I didn't even crave the covers  
of human flesh around me—  
I just wanted the dark  
inward drift of self.  
My body fevered through  
the thinness of my skin,  
saturated like the streets  
of Veracruz,  
as if lilies cried  
within the jungles  
of Oaxaca,  
where I was  
to be born.

But Veracruz  
is where I separated  
myself from  
my umbilical cord,  
a chain immune to rust,  
that provided for me,  
there within my mother,  
there where I was never thirsty,  
there where hunger was unknown,  
there where I was part of her.

Today from underneath my fingernails,  
vines grow to touch the corners of the room,  
a leaf suctioned it self to the ceiling  
and wraps its winding stem  
around my neck.  
Somewhere my soul waits,  
submerged beneath the Gulf of Mexico,  
while here...  
here I sit staring out  
searching for the sea.

## Aubade

I think it's time to get up,  
make tea, listen,  
my thoughts railed in,  
by Prozac, Xanax, an aspirin or two,  
an infomercial for women to lose weight,  
for me to try a new drug I can't afford,  
my mom nagging about boxes  
that take up space that's not hers.

My stomach growls, echoing  
the call of a passing crow,  
an ant runs across the numbers  
of my keyboard, missing my fingers  
as it passes over letters, my life  
already numbered in coincidences,  
how my daughter was born  
the day my birth certificate was issued  
20 years earlier, or how the earth shook  
in Veracruz the day I was born.  
Somewhere beneath the tree outside,  
beyond the screened square,  
beyond the dirty glass,  
I set myself free  
to swallow the wind.

## A Thing about Sunset

No one told me that life continues on after the light turns dark,  
a window stays open letting in the breeze, as my eyes in the light turn a darker shade of blue.

No one said morning was a sunset somewhere else, or that the sun setting was daybreak,  
mornings blink over the horizon like sparrow eyes, and fly away as daylight turns into darkness.

No one told me how an empty champagne glass still reflects like a mirror my age  
on its crystal curves, and how it looks— an alpenglow as the afternoon light turns dark.

No one said that this poem speaks of sunsets and days closing like hibiscus blossoms  
as they die, it's about life disjointed until death, the extinguished candlelight leaving darkness.

A thing about sunset is that if you think of my heart as a sun, beating away time,  
you may see past my skin and find that it waits 'til the day my inner light turns dark.

## Sunset at Cabrillo National Park

The sun stays hidden in an envelope of clouds and sinks beyond the sea. I feel like my old wounds are being spliced beneath a microscope, splitting open secrets I don't want revealed. I sit and watch the ocean waves, my thoughts begin to evoke the doctor's green eyes, who emptied out my womb. A fetus, lifeless, now rots inside a trashcan somewhere, canopied by nurses in blue scrubs. There were no bells when you were unborn. You died before being born, but why? Punishment for my sins, I thought. Now hell reminds me, points my eyes across the blue rip currents, they draw me in, drown me. Death welcoming at its front gate, you're not there. Your hands aren't there to pull me out. Give breath to saturated lungs that scream for air. Sweet child, I cast you out into the night. I'll never see you grow into the flower you were meant to be, to grow on in daylight, the passing moon your petals. I covered, with the thought of you wilting inside me. Now I sit, watching the waves carry me off to another place where a child swarms around me, lighthearted across the sea.

## Emptiness

*Existence was born  
when we fell in love with emptiness.  
Rumi*

A dead ant lies on top of my lamp,  
its body curled. I think of it  
as I look up, trying  
to see beyond my ceiling.  
My body, open like the sky,  
and yet closed into a wormhole  
that doesn't let love out,  
curls up, my fingers grip  
my stomach forming small mountains,  
prairies beneath my breasts.  
I sink into my mattress.

I can almost hear the ants  
circle around me, a cry  
for the lost one on my lampshade.  
My body joins them, my fingers  
keep stroking my abdomen,  
and the absent child within.

## Maybe the Dead

No one knows what troubles me,  
as I'm in bed wondering  
if the sugar-bowl has enough sugar  
For my morning coffee,  
not even the worm slugs beneath earth, the ground,  
dug up, slimy creatures like my insides,  
stretching wrecks with no taste for sweetness,  
know how my evenings disappear  
like spilled wine.

As myself, I dream of coffins  
as small individual hotel rooms  
beneath the ground,

until the worms can't stand  
the smell of human flesh  
rotting like the uncooked chicken  
in my refrigerator— that smell  
that won't go away.

I'm beaten hard by the summer heat  
pouring through my office window  
but it doesn't matter. I wish  
that dirt surrounds me, covers me,  
and I run, an ant escaping  
from beneath a looking glass,  
but I, unlike the ant,  
can't carry my own weight,  
and I'm left alone within the ground,  
and left with no one, but maybe the dead  
who walk the streets with their heads down,  
and who don't want to know.

## After Daily Disappointments

You wake to the flecked beads of dew that spread thin rainbows through the window across the stucco wall. Lift yourself from underneath the covers on your canopied bed. An extra blanket, pillows and yesterdays clothes are stepping stones across the floor. Listen to the rustling of the wind outside, while the silence of your unshared room echoes around you in the air. Your ambitions, your youth, and rose petals in November. Your dead skin cells, dry and ashy like crunched-up leaves.

The light from the window is a transparent path over the linoleum floor. The bathroom at the end, spring in the middle of fall. You follow instinct, and walk straight to your coral washbasin. Lemon scented soaps, lotions and a toothbrush, waiting. Look up. You see your chocolate curls overworked the night before into calm waves that flow down your back.

Your fingers stroke down to your face, from the smooth long tresses to your eyes. Dark pools, deep black centers that focus on the roughness of your hands as you slide them away. Days marked upon them like rings within a tree, each saying where they've been. The times they've held a pencil, sketching out outlines of feathers in the wind.



## Insomnia

10:30

My hair, wet,  
from my cold shower,  
the hot-water knob's broken.  
Clothes are lain all across  
my bed waiting since last week  
for me to put them away,  
just like the bats have waited  
in my closet for me  
to set them free.  
But hell, it took me two weeks  
just to wash them,  
so they wait wrinkled  
like my skin will be  
ten years after I've died.

1:15

It's been one hour forty-four,  
correction forty-five minutes,  
since I threw my clothes  
back into the clothes basket,  
now it's me on the bed  
counting spots on the ceiling  
where the rain can sneak through.  
Strategically finding holes, where  
the water can hit my face, to wake  
me up, but not today.

3:00

Sleep eludes me  
like a cockroach waiting  
on the countertop,  
my sandal in my right hand,  
I think I catch it on the marble  
surface, but it still manages  
to scuttle away.

3:40

I think I fell asleep,  
though it's been a while,  
my eyelids closed,  
but they're only broken shutters  
that pop back open,  
each hair too short  
to be tied down.

Somewhere in the room  
I hear a mosquito fly  
cruising for my blood,  
as I look for the depths  
of sleep.

5:00

My body heavy  
from the weight of itself  
somehow made it to the bathroom,  
my arm humped over the sink  
my hair crushed against the wall,  
sleep decides to find me,  
flows through me  
like water down  
the drain.

## The Sound of Death is Silence

Outside the moon  
disappears behind morning,  
it hides as sunrise sneaks by it,  
beyond the stars, freckled  
across the horizon.  
But here there is no sun,  
there are no rays that hide the moon,  
or stars that mark the many lives  
that have passed us by unnoticed,  
an old woman with her gray hair plaited  
along her shoulders, the man whose face, beaten  
to a pulp, or a child's ghost watching us from the alley.  
Here, where clouds cover our wounds like scabs,  
death's shrouded in red silk, and morning  
never seems to arrive, hidden  
behind crumpled skyscrapers.

Here there is no sun, only neon lights  
with broken bulbs, there is only a child's heart  
within my hands still beating.  
While somewhere beneath  
shattered glass my heart stands still  
waiting for the sun to rise.

With Silence the Last Light Breaking

The room's engulfed  
in light as a wave  
shatters into glass pieces  
along the mahogany carpet.  
"Seven years bad luck,"

My absent daughter whispers,  
through dust particles  
no longer  
invisible.  
I feel the past  
in pieces,  
each remnant manifested,  
in silvered glass.

Before,  
the mirror fell from my hands.  
Before,  
when I was searching for something  
in that reflection.  
Waiting  
for my mouth  
to form an answer  
to all my questions,  
I've written in memory,  
stored away, unlabeled,  
unanswered.  
Who I am?  
What is existence?  
Why my unborn baby had to die?

But the questions slip away,  
my daughter's voice disappears,  
only empty answers, and dust  
linger over broken glass.

## Waking the Lilies

1. She sleeps in a canopied bed of green mattresses.
2. She doesn't know her mother forgot to bloom and that there are no petals surrounding her.
3. Somewhere a frog croaks a song of death, here her mother sleeps.
4. She will not find her mother anymore, she's floated away.
5. A woman in a coffin.
6. A lily now rests to float on the skin of the dead.
7. She walks to find another pond to sleep in.

## Poem to My Daughter Before Being Hospitalized Once More

Dark pools of nail polish drip  
across the table top. Drops  
that remind me of night,  
how it closes its eyes  
over me like wounded butterflies.  
Along the street is a hill covered  
by the rich green of English Ivy.  
Its leaves sway to the wind  
while passing traffic mimics  
the sound of waves.  
Sleep takes me little by little  
into the darkness of broken wings  
speckled by the stars.  
My eyes look up at nothing,  
my heart beat the only sound.  
My fingertips curl  
as I fall beyond the edge.  
The side of my bed, made up  
of dirty clothes mixing  
with the dust on the floor.  
I wish I were the dust,  
except when my feet touch it  
when I wake to an empty house,  
and my soul blends itself with it.

This morning I watched  
as my daughter got out of the car,  
to board a plane at sunrise,  
her eyes, vacant in disbelief,  
tears dried up to anger,  
her mother's illness  
like a cancer ate away  
the one person she felt  
the most connected to.

Fate,  
a broken stoplight,  
takes me at thirty-three.  
My fingers clutched  
the steering wheel,  
her shadow, a wrinkle  
in the horizon.

## Behind Locked Windows at the Western Medical Center

### I. My Room

Red curtains cover the view from outside,  
I picked the bed next to the window, so I could  
get out. I see the twenty four hour fitness center  
across from the street; I can almost see Jane  
Doe running on the treadmill again, wishing  
that it were some cliff off the PCH.

Minutes circle the hallway, waiting  
for time to call on them to stop,  
take a breath and get their medicine.  
A cookie crumbles between my fingertips,  
like my mind, it erodes  
in my mouth, where  
milk washes it down.

My roommate humps the air,  
calling on her father,  
arms holding tight to the bed,  
pelvis thrusting air,  
air thrusting memories.  
I turn away, and just stare  
at the curtains.

### II. Hallways

I walk the hallways like a hooker  
looking for a quick fix, naked  
beneath her robes, an easy access  
for the hall lights to peak through.  
Here they think  
I'd use my underwear,  
to kill myself,  
tying them together,  
one by one,  
until the noose's  
around my neck,  
my leg bare, hanging.

Every now and then,  
the nurses patrol the halls,  
clipboard in their hands,  
diagnoses from a doctor  
who's never there.  
Sheets of paper flutter  
like their skirts, as they  
check each breath  
I take, and wish not too.

### III. Courtyard

Smoke roams over my head  
like smog in the early mornings,  
I look up past the gray,  
listen to the whines  
of Nancy waiting for Jesus,  
calling on him to fuck her,  
take her to the alter,  
marry her,  
God their priest.

I look up past the smoke  
and see seagulls  
above like vultures,  
imagining they could  
pass through the fence  
cage that surrounds me,  
and peck my eyes  
so that each orb  
can see from where  
they hover above.

But I look down  
at my fingers, crumbling  
into ashes, each one  
a forgotten cigarette  
resting on the ashtray  
of my palm.  
I float away,  
caught in the rush  
of distant traffic  
in the breeze.



Contemplation on God during a Spirituality Group at the Riverside Center of Behavioral  
Medicine

After Vallejo's *Los Heraldos Negros*

At night the Death Riders gallop through the hospital hallways,  
their hoof-beats pound with the strength of jack hammers against iron.  
There's a distinct rattling of chains, my chains! Two choices held me down;  
to either come willingly or by force.  
Here within the hospital walls God pounds his fist against us...

Some tortured souls come out from drab, empty rooms for communion; alcoholics beyond  
communal wine, addicts who get their clinical fix before convulsing as if possessed.  
An innocent girl hears voices, the Devil's cutting board along her arms.  
Are we to accept these things in life? The heart overtaken embossed,  
like the two telephone cords hidden in the nurses' office, until it forgets to beat.

I hear the riders pass, promising death they'll never deliver, though I crave it  
like an addict does crack. I hear the sewer lines open up, covering  
up our stench, our existence? Until we ride away one night, upon those black steeds?

I am a woman, whose bloody fists cross my brow. I can still turn my blue flaked eyes,  
the crimes of hatred towards myself. A slender blade along my wrist  
cuts a nice straight line; my legs part for some stranger,  
And all this gathers neatly in the palm of my hand  
like Ambien as it drifts me off to sleep.  
There are trials in life that trample the soul...

## Parts of Me

Sometimes I feel that my life  
is a stained glass window,  
shattered into pieces.  
Pieces that can no longer  
be reconstructed, a puzzle  
hard to put together,  
because two pieces are missing,  
the ones that form the doe's eyes  
as it stares up from drinking water.  
She's no longer able to see me,  
and I'm not able to see myself through her.

Sometimes, I wish I could wipe  
away the roughness of the stucco  
on the ceiling, smoothing it out  
to match the walls that surround me.  
Maybe then something would make sense,  
like the meaning behind the birthmark  
that covers my neck, a hicky from God  
I tell my friends when they first see it.  
For my mom it's always been dirt  
that couldn't be washed away,  
as a baby she tried, and in a way still tries.  
She scrubbed at it until my skin  
was raw like scraped-up knees  
when I was learning how to skate.  
I can still feel her hands scrubbing,  
sometimes it is as if she wishes  
I would disappear into my skin,  
disappear into the motions  
of sex that made me.  
I can sometimes feel  
that she wished for a son,  
but found a daughter instead.  
Sometimes I wish  
I were that shattered  
stained glass window,  
but now I only wish  
to find the missing pieces  
in hopes to complete my eyes  
and only see myself in a crystal stream.

⌘ iii. Metamorfosis ⌘

## Moving On

Why is it I write my hopes on paper, as if it cared?  
To move closer to the cathedral in Veracruz  
with its scent of gardenias, move away from  
unscented lilies, wet dirt, and skunks that hide beneath  
the floorboards, their young huddled around them.  
I feel as some train conductor, derailed with  
my words scattered about like overturned cars.  
I can't help but ask, and ask again,  
*Where is life taking you?*

And then I think of the sound that whistles  
through the house as I call my daughter down  
for breakfast, her bowl of Lucky Charms on the table,  
her backpack against the chair, her homework  
still out, scattered next to the flower vase.  
I am the conductor of tiny things,  
the stars pressed into constellations  
on her bedroom ceiling. I am a mother,  
a poet who feeds off the magnetic letters  
on the refrigerator door. I am a lover  
of darkness, which covers me in its arms,  
when everything else has turned away.  
I am meat and bones moving on.

*No Quiero Ser Quien Soy*  
*after Jorge Luis Borges*

I don't want to be who I am, this nothingness of cells, connected by a glue that thins with each movement I make.

I'm sitting at the kitchen table covered by a mango green tablecloth, I look beyond beige curtains and stare out at nothing but a blue jay, wishing I were it, perched on the fence, blending with the azure paint that peels away like water when it rains.

I don't want to be this tasteless recipe of meat, created by my mother and father, that'll only spoil in time, my father's nose, my mother's eyes, both their tempers that flare like moonlight during a coastal storm.

I don't want to be just me, sitting, writing, listening to the whispers of my *abuelita* telling me stories— of a lovely cockroach who buys herself a red ribbon with a peso she found while cleaning beneath a chair, she later sits and waits for romance outside her door, and finds it in a young mouse named Ratoncito Perez, who she'll always love, and whose love will tear the feathers off sad pigeons when they fly away after they hear her cry, when he dies.

I am only the nostalgic little girl who cares, breaking her only water jar to the cries of a lost love, the sadness of the pigeons and a prayer that God would hear her anger within the shattered clay.

## I Dream of Whitman

Something about the uncut grass of graves has me brushing them gently in my dreams. Last night, he was watching me as I grew from nothing, and he opened his arms wide, welcoming a child, and saw through the fog, the thickness that covered my face. I was some illegitimate hope planted within my mother's grave, born beneath the grass, beneath the scent of lilies. I felt my arms grip my cord, twist it around each finger and arm by arm, I separated, my legs, roots that held me by his side, my voice a budding note.

Whitman, you are the mirror that shows, my hair, braided like the waves along the coast of Veracruz, my skin's blank pages. You are the hand that leads my hands to weave like mangrove roots along the coast, the fish a colorful splatter of ink. The dream of my father in the chill night, in the warmth of my breath as I sang, my voice hoarse in the morning sun. I sang to the graves next to yours, the ghosts in chorus with the lilacs and the rain. I sang to you and no one else.

Dreaming Of Lake *Xochilmilco*

All night I dreamt  
of sparrows  
landing on my  
outstretched wings.

I dreamt I was an eagle  
perched on a small cactus  
rising from Lake *Xochilmilco*,  
surrounded by *chinampas*,  
the yellow, red and green  
canoes that drift  
filled with gardenias,  
up and down the canals.  
I took in the perfumed air  
of the white petals  
as they floated by.

I remember  
a young girl, light  
on her knees,  
surrounded by blossoms,  
as she held the oars  
of the small Mexican  
canoe, built from  
the trunk of a willow  
that once stroked  
the water with its  
long limbs.

She reminded  
me of myself,  
free from the cage  
of stillness,  
when I was free  
to take flight,  
above the temples  
shaped like ant hills  
where the *mixteca* priests  
reached for the stars.

2.

If there were roadways  
that took an easier path around life,  
I wouldn't take them,  
I would come to the end  
only to return  
to childhood.

Back to when I was six  
playing in a ditch, letting  
my feet feel the slimy bits  
of earthworms  
between my toes.

If there are no such roadways,  
it does not matter,  
I will just wait, to be  
part of the rain,  
or grow maggots  
spreading like white confetti  
inside my stomach.

3.

Last night,  
I stayed up late,  
listening to my fingers  
do nothing,  
my eyes closed,  
head on top my desk,  
turned away,  
lost in Xochilmilco  
where I was the girl  
surrounded by the blossoms,

the sounds of bells,

and with wings  
free to soar.



Morning Dreaming of Absolutely Nothing

*Let this window be your ear.*

*Rumi*

It's 10:08, morning dances  
in a palm – the sky, smog less –  
the trees' green smiles line the streets.  
White mocha music, warm around my lips  
is like the abstract hanging in the coffee shop  
of a bird feeding its hatchling its first breath  
of morning air and a worm that looks like  
caramel-chocolate that would confuse  
the ants that carry away everything.

Outside I hear invisible skateboards,  
the squeals of brakes from the passing RTA.

My head hurts, but the music still soothing,  
I'm covered by the scent of green tea  
and chai, at times the best thing  
is almost nothing.

## Dandelion

Morning stirs,  
the sun ripples  
in fragmented shadows,  
planes pass low over the house.

She remembers a time  
when monarchs blossomed,  
their wings spread wide  
until their camouflage  
of yellow irises stare  
out towards spring  
in the tropics.

Palm trees once  
gave her shade along a road  
lined by avocado trees,  
as their fruit dangled like opal earrings  
with milk-emerald green at their center,  
similar to the ones her *Abue* gave her  
last year for her birthday.  
Near them a mango tree  
grew in solitude, its pale  
fruit reminds her  
of her skin,  
and the paleness  
of her life.

Here she waits to find home,  
caught by the roar of a plane,  
a dandelion seed,  
she flies away  
and plants herself  
until she blooms.

*Yo no soy un caracol...*

Am I the Columbella shell, yet far  
away from home, the sea now just a dream?  
Did I just float within her hands, a stream  
of pearls surrounds me, *tan lejos del mar*,  
the sand a silk blanket that shines like stars.  
I rest between her breasts, alone, a gleam  
spires inside my freckled shell, a moonbeam  
on my plicate skin *empieza bailar*.

But I don't dance, I remain still, as light,  
I remain poised with each breath she takes. Waves  
caressed my heart, embraced it through the night.  
*Yo no soy un caracol*, I'm a cave  
unearthed by man, I sleep outside my skin.  
Will I soon return where the sea begins?

## Existence in a Grain of Rice

It's hard to walk past the sign  
without stopping, without looking  
at how small you'd be, a miracle,  
your name on a grain of rice.  
The thought of being a seed, hidden  
in a bottle hanging from a simple red thread,  
and the absence of any required breath  
rests there above your lungs,  
next to the heart that doesn't beat  
to a solitary rhythm but takes a pause  
when it wants to, not needs to,  
like the words across a newly written poem.

Last night I dreamt I was a butterfly,  
squashed between my daughter's fingers—  
she pulled my wings apart, ripped  
them into pages that will now remain  
unwritten, unheard like a raven's black wings  
as he pecks a *gusano* in the night,  
its body wriggling in between its beak.  
So like the worms I found in the rice  
before I cooked it, their bodies will be, nameless,  
mix in my skin, all of us  
never again in need of letters  
to seek the spirit in the soil.

*Bajo Mi Piel*

In *el Puerto de Veracruz*  
a woman peels away dead skin,  
she washes her *piel*,  
with scented honey soap,  
made from the fat of a pig.  
She continues to lather  
her breasts, then her arms, lingers  
briefly over auburn curls, down  
to the points of her toes.

Here in Riverside my feet fade,  
they dissolve like the soap,  
stream down the drain, my skin  
melts into the smell of bee's wax  
separated from its sweetness.  
My skin wrinkled unlike hers,  
hers rejuvenated in the tropics,  
sweet as fallen mangoes.

Here in my bathroom,  
I wash away dead cells,  
rinse them down with cold water,  
they work their way  
down the lavender tiles  
into the metal circle at my feet.

Here in the solitude of the tub  
my body lets go, and joins  
her skin, and we become one,  
our skin rustling along the breeze  
caught in a seagull's beak.

In Veracruz

I will die in December,  
where *el Norte's* winds  
will take my spirit  
in its arms back to the sea.

I will die, in my hometown  
with *la Bamba*, playing,  
touching the small fingertips,  
hidden within my earlobes.

I will die, where the waves  
are made of white skirts  
rustling to a *Jarocho* playing  
the *marimba* at the *Malecón*.

I will rest my head  
against the split trunk  
of Doña Angela's mango tree,  
its fruit, struck down by lightning.

I will rest my feet  
beneath the sand  
where crabs pinch  
the remainder of my skin.

But I will find death  
beneath a blanket of music  
beneath the palm trees  
hovering over me  
like worried mothers.

I will die with my spirit  
walking lightly into the sea.

## A Gentle Wind

A gentle wind blows the clouds apart  
like curtains made of smoke-blue lace,  
that have fallen within the sky.  
A bright moon lights-up a forgotten road,  
while someone whispers, but doesn't answer  
my voice as I reach for him.  
A shadow moves, but doesn't come towards me;  
*mi abuelita* brings *lentejas* in a small coconut bowl,  
the coconut's milk next to it, waiting in a glass  
but I choose not to drink from it.  
Content with the little I have—  
a bowl of lentils, the sun my only lamp,  
the ease of life worthy  
of shiny pebbles, gems within the pool  
while the tailfins of golden carp polish  
each one as if they were diamonds.

## Gardenias

My fingers collapse  
into the pit of my palm,  
close around a memory  
of me as a child  
with no worries.

A time  
when gardenias  
bloomed in my *abuelita's*  
garden, the air sweet with riddles,  
she continues to retell.

A time  
I feared nothing –  
the spider is as beautiful  
as the rose.

Today  
my hands hold on  
to the hope of growing younger,  
with my grandmother's  
words telling me  
to search

*dentro de*  
*esperanzas—*

"Within hope,"  
I repeat, as I let my fingers  
bloom, empty  
into the air.



## Dolphins

I wake up,  
my feet buried  
in the sand,  
my fingers dig  
for crabs that scuttle away,  
as my reflection does.

My toes curl,  
the each wave erodes  
my skin,  
    each grain  
        melts away  
mixing at my navel.

My soul, not a pearl  
within an oyster's  
    smooth shell,  
but a grain of sand,  
    left behind,  
forgotten by the sea.

My dreams  
    take shape  
beyond the rising tide,  
I swim  
    reshaping  
        who I am.

## Silhouette

Whatever comes, comes from a need,  
a sore distress, a hurting want.

- Rumi

### I

Time passes  
I draw the silhouette  
of a *sirena*,  
each day closer  
to the waves  
along the shore.

### II

Feet pass over the sand,  
water touches skin,  
my heart cracks  
from the antiquity of salt.  
I wake up in a flutter  
of seagulls searching  
above in an open sky,  
breaking whiteness of clouds--  
*Una sirena vuelve a casa..*

## The Muse

I work best alone, in the scent of sandalwood, in the scent of rotting fruit, but more so, surrounded by air that smells of roses withering in the rain. I work the best at night. When the cars stop passing by my house and wait like corpses along the street, a shadow or two resting on top of them. I work surrounded by the buzz of a small room heater at my feet, the whistle of the water steaming away on the stove dissolving fragments from my past, like the broken plate in the kitchen I dropped when I burnt myself. I listen for the voices walking on the street, cool with death, covered in scarlet silk that hides their tattered skin, rags within rags. And there is a girl among the crowd, her face, young, like grapes before they're laid out beneath the sun. She wears a black skirt that slips loosely above her hips; I imagine it isn't hers, for she's so small and it tents around her, tied at her waist with a red camisole. I look at her one last time, before my heart skips, before hers detonates. I look at her and feel my lips touching a poisoned flower, its petals a fingernail cutting through my skin, cutting through her veil.

## Papaya Mother's Funeral

Tomorrow I have died

with the rustling of the breeze  
along my eyelids.

My body  
carried off,  
by a whisper of birds,  
pecking at the worms  
beneath my feet.

My hair's tangled,  
I don't care.

My arms along side me,  
each hand pressed  
against *mejicana* hips.

Children bloomed  
beneath my skirts,  
papayas underneath  
the long palmera-like leaves.

My shoulders cold,  
my body covered,  
in the looseness of a dress,  
and I don't care.

My only cares—

listening to the earth  
breathe for me,

listening to the grass  
dancing,

listening for *larvas*,  
worming together  
for supper.

## Winding Down

Day breaks in an endless rush.

I can hear the cawing of crows  
outside in the palm trees.

My stomach's a twisted  
nest of barbed wire.

I wish the soreness  
of my joints

would go away,  
fly off with the nagging crows.

I've spent hours just laying in bed,  
waiting for night,

for another day to go by,  
transmitting the hurt inside

to feathers floating away  
on an autumn breeze.

## Taking Flight

*A fable in memory of Jan Neruda*

*Estimado* Pablo Neruda:

I am writing you because of the following question, “*Why do leaves commit suicide when they feel yellow?*” from your Book of Questions. It saddens me to think that you would ask such a thing, when in truth leaves do not commit suicide. But in order to explain the why I must first tell you the story of a leaf, not any leaf, but a yellow one as you've described.

It all started when a ten year-old boy named Jan Neruda, I believe you've heard of him since you did take his name, followed the instructions of his father and took a Linden sapling and planted it in front of the store where his father was a grocer in *Mala Straná*. The sapling's heart beat until from its core grew longer roots, each day the trunk was thicker, and its branches reached out like veins. Each year leaves sprouted, their stems, umbilical cords connecting them to their mother.

As the tree grew so did the boy, and one day while sitting outside the store near the tree, there was a puddle from the rain that morning. There he met a frog, teacher of all frogs, who spoke about *the heavens as being bright dots we see there burning*. As he spoke some of the leaves listened; one in particular, with his yellowish-green peanut like shape that separated him from the other greener leaves, paid very close attention and looked up at the sky. You see he was high up in the tree, but he could never touch the sky. As he listened to the wise frog, teacher of all frogs, the leaf wondered if he could reach the heavens. Most leaves you see stay attached to mother until they turn brown, fall to the ground and return to their roots. As the frog told Jan and the other frogs, “*how the stars we see... are actually only suns.*”

The leaf listened, and as he did so he spoke out-loud, “I wonder if I could reach such suns and what would happen.” Right then a hooded crow landed near him, and having overheard the leaf began to laugh.

“You can't reach the sun, you barely can reach the sky, you're stuck on your mother like a baby to the breast.” mocked the hooded crow still laughing at the silliness of the leaf.

“What would you know of the sun and sky? You are just a bird.” Responded the leaf defensively.

“I am a bird. And because of that the sky is my home, the wind helps me to get closer to the sun, but I don’t go near it. Rumor has it, that it’s so hot that birds who have tried ended up with their feathers burnt off. Well except the phoenix that resides there, I met her once. She thought I was beneath her, even with my best pick-up lines.” replied the bird bewildered by the memory of the phoenix’s beauty.

“So the wind helps you? Do you think it will help me?” He asked, the crow still lost in memory of the fiery bird he tried to woo, ignored him. So the leaf looked down at this wise frog that seemed to know it all, even if he was further on the ground than he. And spoke up, “*Do creatures live there just like us?*”

The wise frog looked up and surprised at the leaf’s question, answered back, “*Those distant stars and our Earth have the same composition.*”

“So would a leaf like me be able to reach such stars? And meet others like myself away from my mother tree?” asked the leaf.

The frog thought a moment; Jan stared at him for he didn't understand leaf, only the croak of frogs and beetles. After a minute the frog responded, “*Though this is not a reason for some idle speculation there is no reason to not hope, no reason for great fright.*”

The frog’s wisdom was incomparable, and the leaf and even Jan reflected on what he said. The leaf proceeded to make a plan, “If I have hope and no great fright, with the help of the wind I may take flight.” The crow out of his fantasy heard this and laughed, “Good luck with that,” and flew away to search for a dove he met at Saint Charles Bridge, *Mishka* was her name, she was visiting from Russia, so he'd better take advantage before she left.

The leaf ignored the crows comments, but at least he had learned one thing from the bird's nonsense. If he could catch the wind it might be able to fly. So over the next few days he made his plans, told his brothers and sisters goodbye, though they thought him mad. His mother worried for her son gave her blessings, he was fearless so she knew she couldn't stop him. So the day came that the wind blew, and mother tree relaxed her branches so that he would better be caught in the wind. The branch stretched out, with a small crack the umbilical broke, the leaf caught the wind and flew, even for those few minutes of flight his freedom took him to another world. Though he'd miss his mother and siblings, he was a new leaf and the wind carried him to the *Vltava River* where it is rumored he sailed away, and found a love somewhere south of Prague.

So *mi estimado* Pablo Neruda, I must agree to disagree in regards to your question. For to this day as I've overheard tourists who've walked the streets of Prague that they've seen many yellow Linden leaves catch the wind, or flutter with a twin like a butterfly to another world away from mother, and at times they carry with them the seed to become a new parent in a place, that for a tree is still foreign. So as Jan Neruda wrote after listening to that wise frog teacher near the puddle by his father's small grocery store, "*What more about this universe would you like to be told?*"

Sincerely,

The great-great granddaughter of that yellow leaf from Malá Strana

P.S. I also took flight and now reside in Austria, blessing my offspring to take flight if they wish.



*Ars Poetica*

*My house, of course, isn't made of your words  
my house is built of my words  
Ryuichi Tamura*

You –  
who bring me

the quiet-  
ness of night as I sit

alone  
at a sushi bar.

My tongue  
warm, soothed by Miso soup,

a melting—  
pot of pebbles within green leaves.

I watch  
the chef wrap dark seaweed,

white rice  
and I roll into myself.

Here,  
where *unagi* is not just eel,

Here,  
where *kani* is not just crab,

Here,  
where I am no one,

and my heart's  
a delicacy within a blowfish.