

Violeta Orozco

The Broken Woman Diaries

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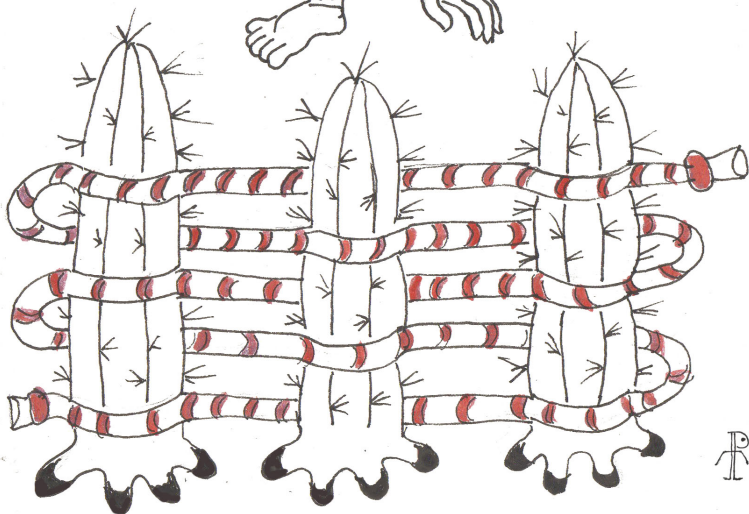
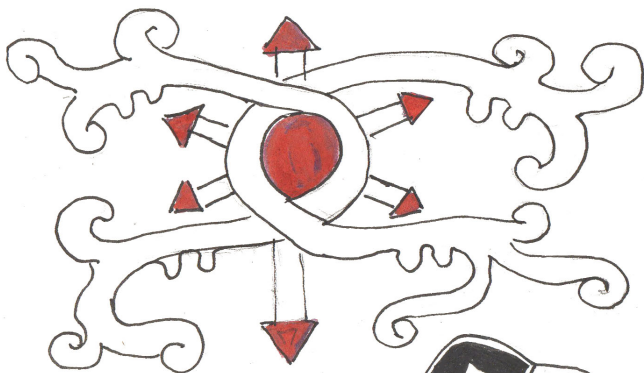


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*Para mi mamá, la escultora que me llevaba
al peregrinaje del Museo del Templo Mayor
para ver a Coyolxauhqui*

[Coatlicue] i am not your broken
daughter healing and breaking in turns
i've spent my life with your other faces
a pantheon of feminine gods

- ire'ne lara silva, *Coatlicue*



RT

Reintegrating Coyolxauhqui:

A Journey to Unity and Liberation

Dr. Naomi H. Quiñonez, author of *The Smoking Mirror: Poems*

Violeta Orozco's collection of poetry, *The Broken Woman Diaries*, delves into a disintegrated and shattered world in search for wholeness, healing and love. The collection channels the ancient Mexican moon goddess, Coyolxauhqui, whose powers were usurped by her brother who flung her down the temple steps where she shattered into pieces. Coyolxauhqui has become a symbol of the fragmentation of women under patriarchy. In Orozco's poetry, love also lies shattered and broken at the base of modern society and the patriarchal controls of history compel the poet to identify and reintegrate the pieces of an elusive puzzle, as she probes the contours of inhumanity, materialism and superficiality.

because every poem is a love letter
to an unloving ear
to someone who has failed to listen
is too afraid to talk back

There is an unleashing of personal and collective anxiety in Orozco's poetry, rooted in a world of social disorder, collapse and an inability to love. Her raw and compelling poetry lays bare

the brutality of systemic abuse and exploitation in dream like narratives that transcend time and space. Free and fluid streams of consciousness underscore histories of dehumanization, deceit and treachery. Sexual tension and emotional trauma are flown like flags across dystopic landscapes of loss and uncertainty as personal yearnings for love and honesty are forced into shadows. Love, belonging and healing are thwarted by systems of sexism, racism and classism that exile her existence.

I don't (cannot) fit in the places
that did not love me back

However the poet's struggle to "recenter" the scattered pieces of herself and humanity are not in vain, as is evident in some of Orozco's beautifully compelling passages that flow like healing waters across the page, bringing to light the magic of human essence, the durability of love and the responsibility humans have for their own reintegration.

all this time I was a space
where all the other missing pieces
came together.

Like Coyolxauqui the poet understands that she too is in pieces,

that we are all fragmented by a world disassociated from its own humanity. Her poetry leads the reader on a journey that is harsh and dangerous and fraught with illusion, violence and dislocation. At the same time some poems finds their way to divine insights. Hope can mend the broken spirit, self-love can heal the shattered heart and self-knowledge imparts the wisdom found on the edges of a world reeling from its inability to love. *The Broken Woman Diaries* invites readers to share the journey of integration to a new place, albeit uncomfortable and uncertain, it is a journey into the self and a yearning for transcendence. Orozco's hope for herself and humanity is revealed in the following:

May we find a place to share the voice
that was denied to us
may we find a prayer that works
a song that heals.

More praise for *The Broken Woman Diaries*

Pulsing and vibrating with light, *The Broken Woman Diaries* is the dazzling, enthralling second collection from contemporary Mexican poet, Violeta Orozco. I first came across Violeta's poetry a few years ago and felt a powerful connection to her voice. That connection fostered an intellectual and spiritual kinship that in many ways is symbolic of the new era of open dialogue between Mexican and Chicana poets. The work denotes growth. The Broken Woman heals herself and becomes the soothsayer: a futuristic voice for those who are emerging from something shattered. She does not seek wholeness but instead embraces the freedom that comes from breaking free. In breaking free she has created something new; the work is beyond the confines of language. Violeta's poetry is spellbinding and brave, relevant in today's world and in the lives of both Mexican women and Chicanas.

- Gris Muñoz, author of *Coatlícue Girl*

"I misremember." This phrase is the closest the reader will get to a warning, which is to say Violeta Orozco will get her readers as close to truth as sinew does with muscle and bone. Orozco offers revelations around questions the reader has just begun to formulate around issues of violence, memory, and liberation, while dismantling and resurrecting what it means to be gendered female.

- jo reyes-boitel, author of *Michael + Josephine*



Broken Woman Diaries

Day cero. Doppler effect

I was going, fading away like the sound of an ambulance, the thrill of its shrill screams peeling down the avenue. A kid with his face buried in a book walked up and down the subway, blind, oblivious that I was leaving. I was losing the flavor of my sight. Meaning and pain were leaking out of me, a noiseless plant screeching its torn-out limbs. Coyolxauhqui, the first broken woman, the dismembered one, the original prototype, her head tumbling down Coatepec hill. The fall of the waning moon. The only reality that seemed permanent.

The Spider

after Gloria Anzaldúa

Walking the tightrope across two countries
I balance my body in the deadly air.

My song is torn among the four directions
the deadly oceans froth below me.

I know
I cannot stay for long up here.

The rope will tear my limbs will give way
eventually.

I have been trying to keep a precarious balance
willing to believe my balancing act

will restore the order of the world.
Perhaps if I manage to stay they will keep me

on this side I am terrified to fall into the desert
every side is the wrong side

they think I want the greener grass
when I don't even believe in the mirage of the land

that would outfly their planes
bridging mountains and buildings

skyscrapers and highways
of tall trees and thick vines

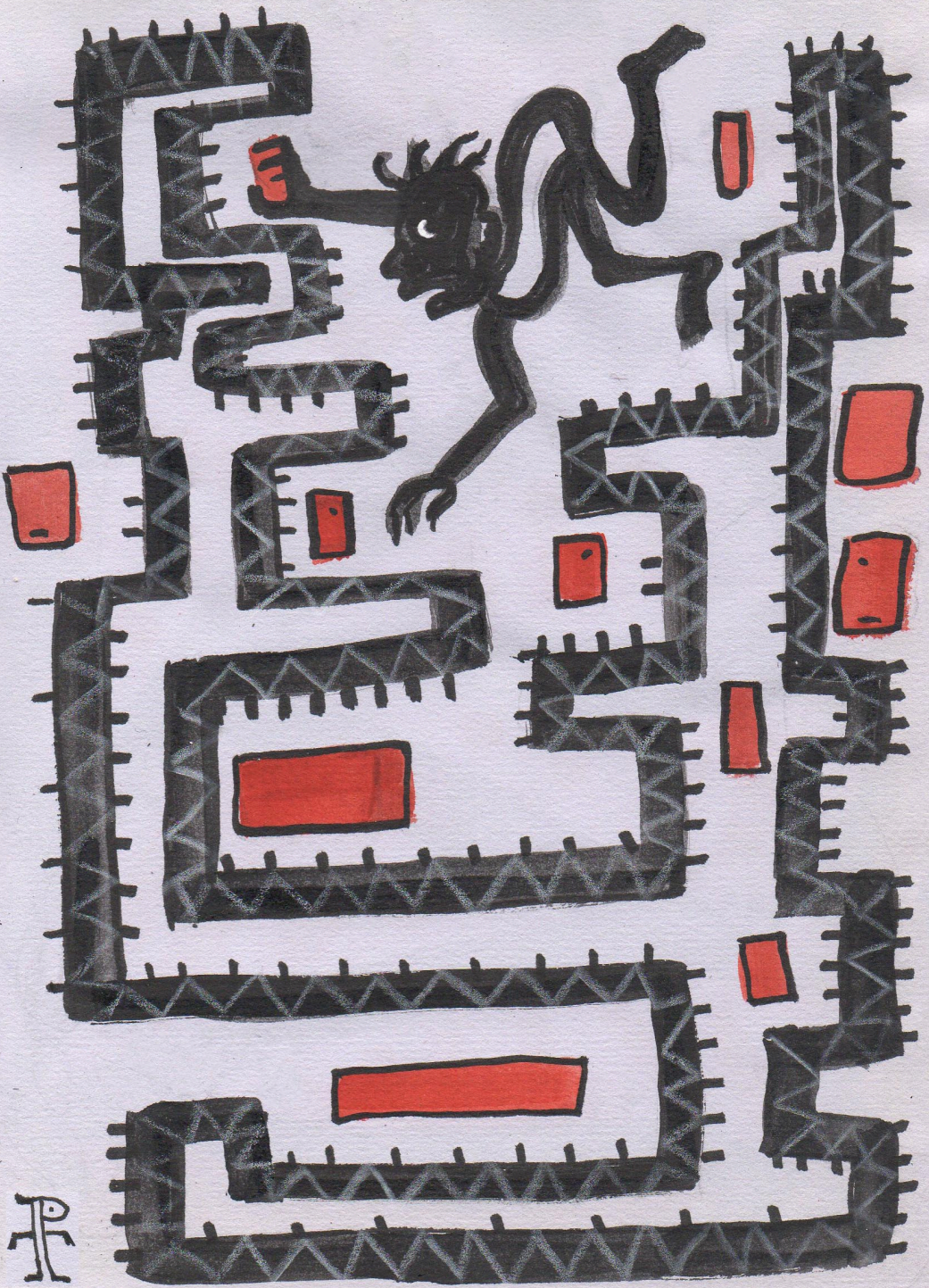
that branch out to reach me
as I have branched out towards you

stretching across
rivers and islands

unravelling
till I reach the silken route

the invisible path
I have paved

among the skies.



Day 1. The black moon

I kept moving away, a picture blurring into movement, bending into the landscape, picking up speed and momentum, asking: where was I hurdling myself? Which shape would I finally take? For so long I had been craving to go, abandon all I had known, blow away into the burning sun. It was time to wash down all I had been, become blank and round, a pebble washed by the sands.

Day 2. Reverting gravity

She who goes away only wants to be free from what she once wanted. Deep inside, she wishes to be recanted, called back by all those she failed to say goodbye to. She who goes away is the one who most wanted to stay — loyal to a single place and face.

She knows time is a flying fish leaping into the rapids, suspended in midair: a salmon reverting gravity, a waterfall moving upward, rushing into the open sun.

Oh, delude yourself for now, traveler of a single land. Every island is your own rundown republic of hope. Why do you expect to build a new self out of a devastated city?

Your tired body bleeds bliss at sundown upon the cobbled path. And yet you feel so new when you looked out the smallest window inside the widest boat.

How you run down the freshly trodden earth as if you'd never seen the sand.

How you holler and pound with your fists upon the newfound planet. Everything will be different now, you say to yourself. At last, I will build my hearth upon my heart — the farthest is now the closest to my home.

The Lake House

we slithered into the sheets two snakes shedding their
 unfamiliar skins
volcanic ash next to the road he said we should see the evening
encroach upon the city I crawled into the ash pile
a mermaid of the earth diving into a different kind of water
a well of sounds and echoes we tossed and turned
wrestled in the bed of ash buried each other
 strange dances of curling craving
 tendrils
 reached into the other dimension of the bed
 my body screamed out a jungle of electric wires
everything was silent in the sleepy night my senses hollered out
light streamed into their sudden veins I could no longer deny
 refuse the moon lighting up my body from the inside
 strange rivers rising from within
the current sweeps me into the lake inside us
seeps through the cracks floods the room
bursting and swelling climbs the high walls
rising higher and higher we split our insides open
become the outer walls of the full circle
 the wood splintered into an ocean
 panic panic panic numbing up the shade
 streets made of limestone liquid bones
gushed forth nothing was solid or straight dissolved

as he touched me a mirror image guessing his own moves
terrified of the body you can no longer control
you roll on through the eons
automated movement a puppet of an unknown impulse
thousands of magnets haywire in your pulverized surface
the compass jumps up and down in different directions
what is presence? you ask a nameless shape
what is the immaterial force we call a body?
your body is a question mark
a mere footprint on the shore of an alien ocean



R

Day 3. Shift-shaping

I was a witness now, seeing the people on the train's platform abandoning the body of the animal like some form of bacterial life, my brain emptying out the marshals of pleasure, the ceremonial guards of joy. Maybe it had been something more than just pain. But this was not a good time to remember. It never seemed like the right time. All the midnight creatures deformed by their solitude and hatred crept out of their lairs. I tucked in my coat, covered my body with the shroud of winter. I entered the body of the lonely house, the strangely hushed home, hibernating until further notice.

Day 4. Return to the native landscape

They are all gone. The ones that loved you and the ones that hurt you. No one is left beside yourself and the great big hole you dug inside you, showing through the thicket that hid the shallow pond, now frozen and quiet and smooth. All the water is seeping in. The cave where you used to play as a girl is now a heap of stones you cannot climb. There are days you know you could rebuild the whole landscape, the blazing beach lit up in the air, the golden drops of water fantastically soaring into the open palm. You know you could restore the color in the sand, you could refurnish the surface of the world with a single hand, like an impressionist painter that makes the water gleam with a single brushstroke. And you are here, staring at the painting of the treetops in the pond.

Fadeout

We dipped into each other
 made of the same impermeable material
 burning water fusing into sand

I don't remember them all
 when did I begin to crave only one body?
 I who had believed

in the pagan myths of multiple deities
 who had only loved fleeting glimpses of beauty
 I could always touch but never hold

Poseidon, Chaac, Tlaloc any water god
 I began to pull him toward me like the moon
 slowly pulling at the distant earth

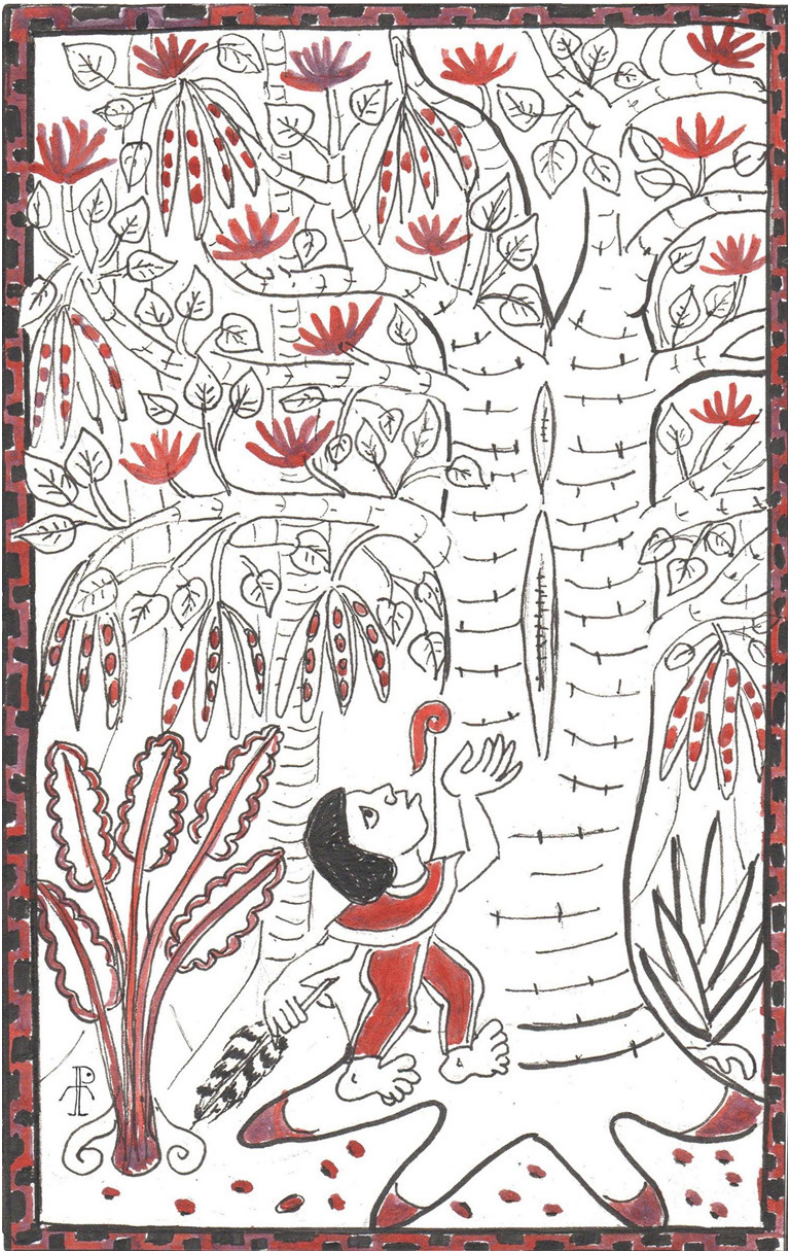
until waves sprang out of the surface
 we drowned inside ourselves
 holding our breath

giggling and tossing full speed
 into the violent shore
 our skin covered in sand and weed and salt

Day 4. La Ceiba (The great outdoors)

I'm trying to picture a sensation that's over 200 years old. The soul of an old saguaro listening to my father gather his stories of the great outdoors. A girl alone in the Sonoran Desert. She is finding her way among orange columns of vertical rocks glowing in the darkling sunset. When she walks towards the north, she sees a porch buzzing with the death of a billion cicadas falling like rainfall in the midwestern forests. A memory of a familiar jungle encases a great Mayan tree full of finger-sized thorns, south of her south. La Ceiba looks down at the fading pyramids. Voices carry over the sea of trees.

I once read a story called *Sleep Out* by Carol Carrick. The cover of the book was a boy with a backpack facing the wild woods. I had drawn myself into the picture, fifteen years before the big trip, el gran viaje. For so long I had wondered how much space it would take for me to find my own breadth. How much space do women need to feel within our own bounds? We had travelled so far already, nomads who had found no comfort on the plains or the mountains, forever seeking a warmer or a wetter land, turning every stone and bed, changing the order and the shape of every object and every animal. Nothing was enough for us, nothing was enough, nothing was ever enough.



A Mexican Medea

Nobody will want to marry me
because of my dark hair
they said I was not Greek
accusatory glances
spelling in hatred
the strange letters of my name

*You witch you bitch get outta here
go back to your country you
fucking terrorist
you savage
cannibal
take back your barbarous customs
you black widow
you slit-eyed slut you
deserve to be abandoned
on your tiny little island
I am so glad Jason left you.*

(This was the official
answer of the law.)

They did not even
look me in the eyes
when I pleaded for justice

abortion or divorce
they ignored me
called me *outsider*
without even asking my name
my country the sound in my language
the word should make

they did not understand why
I had to kill my kids
so many things
would have changed if he —

but they don't care
they only listen to him
 I have tried to talk
over and over again
but they say I am crazy
over and over again
and they run away from me

as if I were a monster
with serpents in my hair
they hate me
without even knowing me

I wish I could
turn back time
back to the time when I saw him
with his foreign dazzling eyes

thinking that for him
I'd leave my country
my father my kingdom

so what if I became poor and unknown?
his love would compensate
any hardships abroad
or so I thought.

I was young then
did not foresee
the end of love
I am old now
I realize I never
had that love
I killed my brother
for a mirage
and I lost him

I lost Jason.

I wonder if I had stayed
would I have found a man
who loved my dark hair
my slanted eyes
who did not require me
to kill for him
to prove I loved him
more than I loved anyone else.

Day 5. The sleepless city

They all got down at Penn Station, running into the stream of office boys, secretaries, clerks and tuxedoed young men hurrying away into boutiques and car rentals, travel agencies, CEOs and executives, all running out of time, into a foreign dimension that cast their day into a grinding machine. Their shoes mingled into each other: black-brown, black-brown, stepping out of time, out of tune to a dance they did not sing, looking deeply into their cellphones, dim-faced, receding, retreating into an inner foam, as if time were a pond that gobbled up the dawn.

I thought of the day my body touched his in vain, the way people on the subway shoved their stern bodies into their neighbor's chest, aggressive, relentless, angry at each and every touch. Oh, when did my skin melt into hatred? When did my loveless skin try to rub into his loveless body? Why did I not see it happen? The somber tide turn against me, his indifferent body roll over the sheets, my hands touch his hair in vain, his face push away into sleep knowing that to awaken was to die.

I crept out of the bed before his eyes could catch mine. I fled out of every bed before dawn, pushing a human-sized doll into their arms so they would not notice I had gone. All the sleepless women expelled by the nocturnal subway, sped off into the dark apartments, cleared the purple path of the lonesome city.



The New Moon

My incomplete
sense of incompleteness
I wonder
to what great hole I belong to
I look up at the
Black Moon
in absent
madness
reach up touch
the strange famine of stars
I pull the white cord of the milky way it
does
not budge a raging river
full of night songs
and bird corpses
travels down
to an alien ocean
I cannot see in this new moon
I can only feel the bridge
the gap
between two bodies
you were there here
naked on the dark hard rock
waiting to push
your body into mine

as the ancient

20th century inscriptions

gleamed in the mossy night

senseless hieroglyphs

cold under our scarred bodies

on the wrong side of the river

the fireflies

screamed out their light in waves in wails

to ignite the naked letters the anonymous love of animals

shouting out names to immortalize their fear

of losing what they never had

but we

had

night

the sense of immortality stemming steaming

from our bodies

a white warm torch in the burning night

we were the summer simmering in its heat

hummingbirds

beating battling in the ocean of the sky

tossing and turning in the

star-infested riverbeds

the steam of the water drifting

into a black sea

The full Black Moon gaping its aimless glance

drinking gobbling up the light

waiting for an eclipse

to blip to raze

to clamp down its frozen mouth

Day 6. The birth of a strange guilt

Love is a strange guilt, you thought as you walked down the gravel path. And why did you experience it as guilt instead of joy? Why did you never think of it as your own human right? As if you were too poor even for that. You felt love was a luxury, rather than a right. With exhausted eyes you looked up at the parades of couples hand in hand, action figures assembled in equal pairs, the same height, the same hair color, the same sesame smile.

You said love as if it were an object, a prize you would inevitably win after a certain time of training for the same race, aiming for the same goal. You were so afraid, so terrified of not winning, of lagging behind. A fucking marathon. That's what love was to you. You had been running all your life and were still unprepared. And yet, you felt you had to win this one, and the next one after that and all the ones that came after.

So you finally left, prepared for battle, your garments lined up and ready to aim. Your body was a trigger ready to be pushed, a tense arrow crouched in the waiting darkness. You went out into the night, squeezing time together, brushing away the blizzard in your face. And you ran in the cold moonless night, making your way between the cars, pulling your hood against your head, running

away from him. This was your turn to disappear. You had to leave because you knew he would return. And you did not want to be there when he came back to claim you, as if you were a scarf pulled off the floor. Of course he loved you. He would love you all his life. But you were no longer sure if that still mattered, as you saw the streams of broken women rush down the merging paths.



No

The woman inside me
thinks she should never say *no*

whenever he comes
she thinks it's her duty
to drop whatever she's doing
rush to the grocery store

leave the food cart abandoned
to meet him somewhere
in some obscure hotel
since he is an important man

those are the rules
if she ever dares
say *no* even once
she fears he'll forget her
never call her back

one of his cuddles is worth
rushing through the city
slugging through the piles of cars
honking at the drivers
shouting at the vendors
shoving cold pastries
into exasperated faces

one of his kisses is worth
closing the shop early
throwing out the kids
who play marbles on the floor
and ride stray dogs
in the absence of horses

even a fifteen-minute fuck
without an orgasm
is worth risking her life
on dangerous bus rides

but she is still willing
to make this sacrifice
to hear his voice
whisper in her ear
you like it like that?

the woman inside her
grows angry and old
jumps out of her womb
screams her first word

a word that would strike him
a sword to cut open
the seams of the world
at last a word
of NO

Day 7. The country inside me

after Carolyn Forché

I am the country I left inside me, the city I destroyed when I abandoned its bare bones for the buzzards in the desert. So long have I hungered for home. How far I had felt from something that was not even there. Because home is the palace I have built inside myself, the space in between, the uncomfortable pause in the middle of the road. I am what I now call home.

I am a skier swooping down a silver fall, an avalanche picking up speed and light — my legs an instrument of pleasure — my body a wing catching the current of gravity. The slope is nothing but a rocket ready to launch me outside the orbit of the earth. Bodies fall at the speed of life, matter disintegrates into time.



PT



Shattered Landscapes in a Woman's Eye



Border Body

for Nancy Jazmín, who died young, just as she predicted

I carry a dead body
across to the other side

her yellow hair hangs
like her life

on a thin thread
the road glitters

the broken shards of glass
cover the scattered bodies

human vultures hunker down toward the trailer
hopping around smashed remains of skulls and hair

limbs blood puddles gather grains beans
potato sacks ripped from the bowels of the truck

I watch the news from another country
squinting to see beyond the blurry video

her beautiful body slumped on the pavement
like another sack of rice.

Nobody carries her to the grave
nobody notices her yellow hair

the gait she had as she walked
the most dangerous ghettos in the city

a blonde girl in a brown neighborhood
defying death at 3 AM

fucking coke-stuffed actors
drunken jocks in the downtown area

just to prove beauty was immortal
as she crossed the borders

unscathed walking the tightrope
the barbwire

between life
and death

Open Letter

I write this to you
knowing you won't understand
because every poem is a love letter
to an unloving ear
to someone who has failed to listen
is too afraid to talk back.

Perhaps our best poems
are love letters to absence
silence
dead lovers
forgotten faces

perhaps our best words
are fraught with pain
because only in pain
can we be humble
only in pain can we be true.

I long for the day I can speak for myself
speak to myself
without having to speak to you in pain

perhaps one day I may be able
to give you words that soothe
words that are able to love you
in your dark corner of loneliness

caressing hands in this tactless age
perhaps I have learned over the years
though these words may not reach you
they are for you

and not only for you
they exist for anybody
that might need them
on the nights when they most feel
unlistened to and unloved

Perhaps one day this poem
may become more than a poem
break the countries that tear us apart
become the love
we were not able to give
I was not able
to materialize.

Short-Lived Love

It's alright, girl
if they don't all bloom
all the flowers
you bought at the market
in the summer
thinking they would stay
until the fall.

Some of them
are still alive.
Let them live, unhindered
other deaths.

Let the others quietly wither
in their corner
brush away their brown remnants
a testimony
of their fallen bodies.
There are no graves for this.

Only the soil
recycling the dead
matter
molecule to molecule
leaf to leaf.

Accept their failed struggle
like yours
is an indicator
of the naked beauty
of their brief lives.

Know you gave them enough water
know you gave them enough light.



P. Temoltyin

The Female Mythologies

They were all beautiful

all of them all those
women in the Greek mythologies
gods died for
warriors fought for

and I wonder
if men would have fought for them
had they been ugly.

I just wonder
why did they have to be beautiful?

A chasm of silence
seems to open between us:
the ugly women
and the plain men

who strangely enough
never seem to know
they are plain.

And maybe nobody
would fight for them

if beauty
wasn't on the line

why did they think
the beautiful women
would want them?

What did they have
to offer?
Why did they think
it was a fair exchange?

Maybe it was not a matter of beauty,
they never seemed to care
for any of the women they married.

Philomela had her tongue cut off, remember?
Helen was more of a possession
than a woman
and even Psyche
the most beautiful of all

was not loved
but merely admired.
She did more things for Eros
than Eros ever did for her.
Her labors were so herculean
that not even Hercules himself —
he killed his wife! remember?

Megara (another beautiful
young woman)
was replaced by Deyanira
a newer probably prettier version
after all

beauty is replaceable
combustible
identical.

I wonder
if they weren't all the same women
the same woman
trying to catch their attention

like poor Hera
who was clearly not beautiful enough
because she had to scold Zeus
so he would remember to fuck her
instead of chasing around a sexy nymph

or even chaste Artemis
who didn't want anything to do with men
who were like her brother

or even Athena
who realized it was safer
to sacrifice her lust for knowledge

or even come on
even Aphrodite
the goddess of sex
who cheated on her husband
because he did not satisfy her

because all those gods thought satisfaction
was something only intended for them
so what did they care if she didn't cum?

sometimes I think of all those women
not as beautiful
but as haggard
tired from always trying to please
trying to win the race of beauty.

I wonder if Persephone
married Death against her will
stuck in the underworld
her beauty a bad bargain
with no one to admire or reward it
an old and embittered lady
looking out from her hapless throne
wondering how on earth she got there.

Was it her mother
who had poisoned her mind
with stories of dark knights
kidnapping white queens

who had made her believe
she would be happy?

If her mother was not happy with her father
then why did she expect her daughter
would find a different kind of husband

one who did not have to take her by force
who believed in freedom
one who would ask her
instead of ordering her around
not letting her out in winter and fall

one who would ask her
what she thought of him
before he raped
or married her
one who would ask
if she liked him
and one who knew
he had to earn her love
without making her pay
for her beauty?

The Boat

I shiver thinking
of your shiver

the way your chin tilts
mirroring mine

I can see you so closely now
as if I'd never seen you dance

at the same speed of my thoughts
tracing your palms on the glass

we follow the trajectory of our bodies
two fireflies alternating light

a slow fragility
molting in the waxing night

I shiver
the numb softness of the silent sky

I shiver
thinking of the warmth

of your whispered words
a slow flame

steadily shifting
in the waning air

I watch the dying city
sink to sleep, the tide

of the shoreless ocean
turn on like a weakening radio far away

I pick up the signal
in my deafening ear

I strain to catch the last words
of your soundless thought

I am with you
somehow

in the stillness
of this dimming hymn

I strum
the chords of my memory

feel your body rustling
somewhere

turning over
like a conch shell in the sand

I pick it up and touch it slowly
bringing its body to my ear

strange melodies are born
out of this dusk

you carry me far
raft of a single feather

bird of a single fire
I know not where I follow

the mesmerizing lull
I can close my eyes and see you

even closer than awake
I bring out a hand to touch the surface

of my dream it breaks
like a membrane of a bubble

I get off the boat
I am already on the other side

The Midnight Air

*The subterranean
beginnings of all light
– June Jordan*

A poet with the name
of a summer month
believed in bodies
that stirred up oceans

blind writing
upon a finger's shore
only now
in the intimate silence
can I finally say your name

I am only a floating plant
heaving in the current

rocks rub against each other
carving the sand
into a dwindling cave

I don't have a single word of solace
for the dying crowds that follow
the trajectory of waves

can we only remember
our hands touching as light
dissolves into the air?

the night is still
I know that you are close
like a thought I put away
saved for later

that day has slipped behind
and I can mourn
what has come back
altered a friendly gesture
in a burning hand

I have weakened
slightly
waiting for the tired tide

I too want to rest and remember
and forget we were once here
waiting uncertain
among hollow leaves

a cockroach nestles
somewhere in the room
we all live accompanied
by our foreign ghosts

why then I wonder
do I see you as a tree
I can rest my head upon?

while I spread myself out
a flowing field
into a mindless sky



RP

Barlife

This is where it all
started
a drunk guy
buying a cheap beer
for a sober woman

who thought this time
he might be conscious
this time
he might REALLY

want her
this night
was different
must be different

because all the other nights
were exactly the same

I am done
she said
I am done with this
as she noticed
the pattern on the wall
the thick vomit

like a drawing
a masterpiece
on the fluorescent dance of music

I am done with them
she thought
spent beer in her hand
and yet she waited
for him
she hoped
this time
he might come back
buy her another beer

this time at least
a better one

Unfinished Business

Here's one to you
not one beer
but one poem

I crack it open
in remembrance of that night
I think it was winter

or perhaps late fall
instead of your body
all I have is an absence

waning on the corner of my eye
I browse through your pictures
how old were you then?

I remember a stormy night
I refused to go to your place
seven nights before

we groped each other in the cold
oblivious and sober
I was scared of falling through

the hole in the middle of the bridge
slipping toward frozen water
shock sheer cliff piercing

my warm skin shivers
I'd better not remember
I left that world

terror was all I had hoarded
packed in one bag swiftly
before the cops came
to snatch it all away.

2.

Fragments
half-remembered walks at night
 the blurry school peeking through the bushes

I don't want that hunger
anymore
you see I had a rule:

never to go back to places
already visited
the same rule held for men

if broken it would upturn the laws of gravity
magnetism interatomic forces
between unstable bodies

and yet I see the children
returning to the playground
gathering the pieces
they left there the night before.

Gunshot #1

We are leaving history

I think as you walk off
my lawn the crime scene
emptied as I hear the car take off
into the scorching afternoon
I never went back in
your body that bar

I refuse to repeat history
we never talked
of all the nights and days
lost inside ourselves

you were too empirical
pragmatic to believe
in vague things
unclear feelings
you would shut up
for hours on end
shut me up
a door of skin and wire
to open at your command

I knew I just knew
you did not want me to talk
after all we had the bed
that common ground

a common language
why isn't this enough?
I mumbled to myself
the morning after

we crumbled into beds of blades
thinking they were rosebuds
to couch our own silence

believing we could rewrite
words with noises
override feelings
with the strange language of hands

Wakefulness

I stay up late
my ears wide open
pricked up
listening

I keep waiting for something
to come around this late
this time of night

Cinderella
even dutiful Cinderella
was already back
by now
I guess I just
don't learn



A Traveler in Time

Flying Southward

They told me to move out west with the browner peoples
said I belonged with my own kind
in wild territories of desserts and casinos

red rocks and holy mountains
where my strange voice
picked up the wind

displaced like the Indians
gradually pushed
farther into the wilderness

they pushed me farther south where I'd come from
said a daughter from the south
belongs only in the wild south

cannot choose her own wide wind
mingle among people of insomniac cities
my voice too close to the sun

would burn their ears too far up north
too close to urban sprawls where the white
snow settles upon the dark shore

devouring any traces of the former land

what did they care where I was born?

what did they care where I was born?

or where I chose to die

or live roam the skies

like a gull swooping down for fish

settling in random islands

momentary truths

they did not know I managed to find my people

on a tiny island off the northern coast

fighting against the emptied soul of a stolen city

huddling in groups like naked geese

squawking at the cold weather

protecting their chicks with wide wings

shielding them from

history revenge hate

fiercer than any long wind

any bird could ever catch



Los vuelos de la muerte / The Railroad in the Skies

Trapped inside lines of the map
hanging from a cliff on the Atlantic coast
a hostage in the cockpit

I watch as the plane glides overhead
pointing its nozzle toward the south
passes over miles like a slot machine

going over the numbers
as they all watch from the stadium
cheering in unison

my Mexican body carried over the oceans
los vuelos de la muerte
surveying the country below

a heavy bomber ambushing the blind
silent land circling the skies
like an impatient vulture

about to drop its cargo
or suddenly swoop down
triggered by a moving target

a Mexican running through the desert
of Arizona or Sonora
his gaze piercing the bushes

to find a den where to hide
like the underground system in Vietnam
bodies finding their way

through the maze with eyes closed
feet recognizing the width of each crack
sensing microscopic alterations of the land

each and every rock and flower
shifting beneath his weight to let him pass
the exhausted migrant

dropping to the ground bathed in sweat
water leaking from his body
greedily lapped up by hot sands

dehydration slowly altering the geographies of skin
dust and dusk settling upon the back
of a cooling body

I have been here before
gazing down at these brambles
a parachutist preparing his landing

an unlikely canopy for a somersault artist
caught between land and water
swirling through the air

where am I going to fall this time?
who am I going to fall back upon?
I look down at the bare mountains

realize they are waiting for me
in the desert on the border
this is where I get off

this is where the plane halts
three blocks away from the country
that pushed me from its womb

here is where it all ends
here is where it all starts
I get off shaken

Schrodinger's cat is neither dead nor alive
I know the answer now
I was condemned to live

I was condemned to live

The Route

after June Jordan

I come from shame. That is my country
and also my name. This is the place

where I come from. The part in me that feels closer
more familiar. I know all the roads lead to shame.

I have always felt wrong. Wrong was a place
almost a home for the homeless

a place where I fit in like Procrustes
the dude they tied to a bed and cut off his limbs

so he would fit
I lower my voice knowing they won't know me

fail to recognize me every time
I enter the room feeling awkward

I must be in the wrong room the wrong
country the wrong gender all over again

Yet something has changed.
My shape has changed.

I don't fit in the places
that do not love me back

all this time I was a space
where all the other missing pieces
 came together.

Outside the Turtle's Shell

I write this for you today
knowing we will return
beyond our broken sense of self
all of us are looking beyond ourselves
gathering our shards

sweeping the floors with our bodies
our skins full of holes bleed

we will return to what we call home
even if it is not home

 we will call it home
because this shell carries us across the oceans
this raft carries far
beyond the earth

 we recede into the open ocean
gathering our amphibian strength

la tortuga se guarda
hasta que se acaba la tormenta

allá afuera aguarda
the ocean of pain

 you dive deep inside yourself
and you surface gathering the pebbles
upon the uneven shore





Soothsayer, Murmurador De Alivio

*Our stories are so holy
we refuse to share them
with non-believers
until we find
those that understand.
—Mario Pagán Morales*

It will be long before I find the center of the world
the place that opens
when eyes shut down
gaze into the internal night.

May we find a place to share the voice
that was denied to us
may we find a prayer that works
a song that heals

the body of the soothsayer.
Our stories are not fully ours
unless they are shared.
May we not speak in soliloquy

I do not monologue alone if my tongue
branches out like ivy
curls into other branches
crawls into ancient forests

where sound is curled up into itself
guarded by a thin membrane of silence
like a shut-eyed frog
creeping under leaves

the canopy towering above him
a small brown body
under a layer of soil.
Nobody will suppress the deep

croaking of a growing song
rising gradually above the ocean's hum
leaking into rocks
receding like the song of coquí in the forest
drawing the ear deep into eons
behind the green curtain

blue orb exploding
into the deep abyss of the eye.

Chicken Soup

As you fold the pieces of dark
meat in the soup

you think in this thirty-first year
of your first love or your last winter

it doesn't matter now. You are old
as a full-grown tree

a house your parents bought
thirty years ago.

It all dawns upon you at dusk
waving at your youngest self

a foreign ship on the edge of the ocean.
The soup is cold now. And how

you changed to stay alive
smiling at painful things

that seemed so dear.
They are far now.

As far as the warm soup
your mother cooked for you

when you were shivering and runny nosed
waiting for the cold to pass

under the fortress of your blanket
thirty years ago.



A small, stylized signature or logo located in the bottom left corner. It consists of a few simple, geometric lines forming a character that resembles a stylized 'R' or a similar symbol.

Tune for a Dying Man

I'm sorry this has been your life.

I sit at the foot of your hospital bed

helpless and slumped thinking

what can I say to soothe your ancient pain?

I've always felt futile at the foot of death.

What can I say better than this faceless silence

breaking between us? I am sorry

your life has been this awkward

fumbling in an unfamiliar place.

You know I never felt at home.

It's you who is dying

and yet now

I am close to your age.

I am a threshold letting in the light

the sun is leaking like a blood-soaked rag.

I should not say this.

There are nicer things to say to a dying man.

It doesn't help to know that a strange plague

is felling millions like a quiet rage

burning through the upturned sky.

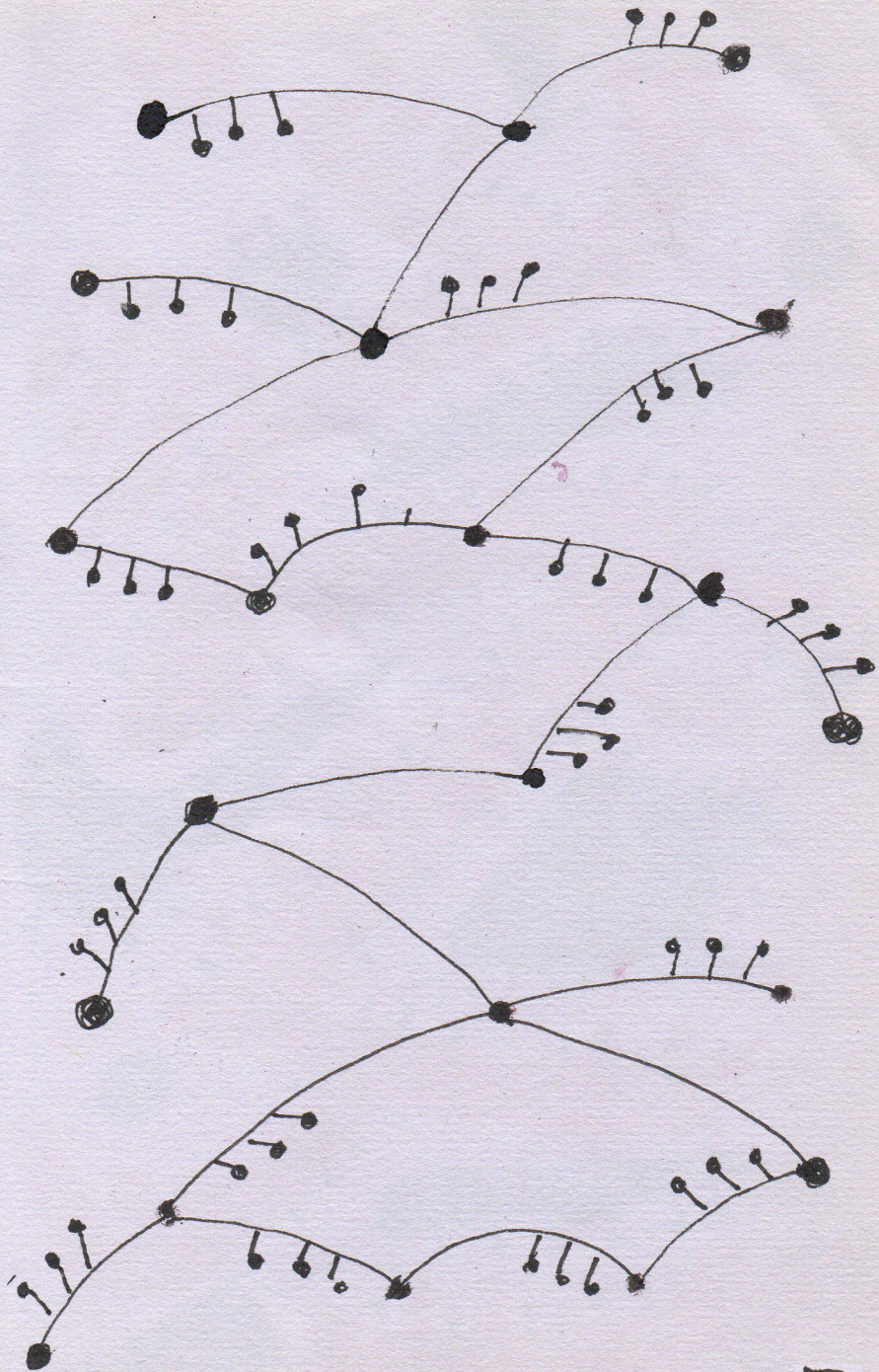
My forehead boils in shame

as if I had only come

to reassure myself

I am a survivor

who cannot share the spoils.



Litany for the Deaf and Dumb

They will know you
by your voice
once you speak up

in the podium
look up from their screens
as if recognizing something

some old familiar force
that fed their truths
a fountain or a river

surging
inside themselves.

That was the voice
they had abandoned
forgotten or betrayed.

It is somehow still there.
And maybe now
in the quiet

ringing of the silence
you can make amends
with your body

anger piling up
like dead leaves
in the alley down the street

maybe now
you can forgive all those
who had no ears nor eyes

because perhaps
their resistance to your fire
only rekindled
the flame.



The Sleepless Generation



The Sleepless Generation

for Pepe, Mexico City, Ajusco Mountain, December 2019

We were the sleepless generation, constantly staying up late, steeped in seasonal paroxysms of anxiety and despair, boiling over dismal forebodings slowly eating up our strength. Paralyzed into inaction or spurred into desperate hyperactivity, we would surf the internet for freelance gigs at 3 AM, multitasking and tutoring on weekends, announcing our multiple skills on Facebook, despondent but vaguely hopeful that the crisis would end, that something would somehow change. Nothing was stable, we had slowly come to understand. Our generation was so used to being exploited that we learned to normalize the love of exploitation. Some of us did not realize that the right to be exploited was oftentimes rebranded privilege because so many of us were unemployed for so many years. And yet, we were all so thankful for being part of the happy few. Whenever we got a job, no matter how crappy or cruel, we would feel blessed or chosen, even with the cyclical bouts of depression, sleeplessness, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, debts, and the sheer terror of losing the false sense of security that would come with it. Even then we considered ourselves to be undeniably lucky, happy with the tradeoff that we managed to get away with.

At all costs we tried to keep our meagre, underpaid temporary jobs. We didn't want to be taken for *ninis*, as they called them in Mexico, those graduates who, like in Dustin Hoffman's movie, were trapped

between the limbo of graduation and the utopian and alienated job market. As if we had not already been *ninis* ourselves for a long time. We were always graduating, going from school to school, from middle school to high school to undergrad to grad school if we managed to get in. Living with our parents for so long, we experienced adult life as grown-up children that had to abide by the house rules. Many of us did not marry. Few of us wanted to have children or dogs or plants to take care of, we were so busy and so afraid to be poor, even when we were already poor. We were an impoverished generation, starving for the success of our parents, always moving to places with cheaper rent and more abusive landlords.

As for those of us who were in grad school, the few who had temporarily migrated in search of dollars, safety, hope, we traded our youth and our workforce for a job in a school where they would kick us out after two or four years of maximizing our labor. And yet we were proud. We were proud of having left, as if leaving were a way of showing our dissent with a world that refused to house us. Generation Diaspora, we would come to be called. And we grew up between two countries or two cities, unrooting and uprooting ourselves, alternating between our parents' homes and our borrowed or nomadic dwellings, hating the hate they fed us for being perpetually out of place.

And to what would we ever come back? To a country that wouldn't remember how young we had left, that would shrug at whatever

we became? All the men I ever loved, taken or crazed, gone as my city reeked by crime and hatred, all of my friends indifferent to my fate, to my return. Those who have left are forever returning, to the death of whatever they left behind. I came back in the dead of winter, replaying Cohen's album, *Songs of Love and Hate*, obsessively in my mind.

The crumbs of love that you offer me, they're the crumbs
I left behind. Your pains are no credentials here, they're
just the shadow, shadow, shadow of my wound.

And what crumbs would I follow now that the birds had eaten the path back to my parent's house, the house that had been already sold?

I stepped into an avalanche, it covered up my soul. When I returned, my acquaintances would no longer be there. They would have already been expelled from the academies that had failed to convert them into alienated workers. All those who stayed became a shiny cog in the wheel. I could imagine Ginsberg howling in the Cannabis Garden of El Eden in Las Islas, Ciudad Universitaria, in the School of Philosophy and Letters, where the junkies and the poets used to hang out waiting patiently for Nirvana. I had met Anne Waldman in New York. Her son lived in Mexico City, the only place where The Beats were able to find some sort of whacko sanity, a place where those who worked did not get paid. Those who waited for days living on their drumming classes, retired to the hills, not daring

to come down to a city they feared, come down to the valley to face the cheerful indifference of the University.

This was the same university that had stolen your work saying *this is not your work anymore* tossing all your stuff out of their offices. When you returned, your things were dumped in the door of the labs where you worked the day before without a warning. Nobody knew you, as you walked the deserted Science Department looking for someone, anyone who remembered you had given your life for the institution that excreted you like a fart, jeering at your naivety in believing this had ever been your home. How could all those adjuncts ever have been duped into believing they would someday get tenure, a salary, an office, some sort of recognition for their work in the school that had sheltered them for ten years? Perhaps, for your sleepless generation, work was nothing but a euphemism for some sort of predatory volunteering where you got to bring coffee for your boss, scan the results, bring in the samples, the petri dishes you had bought with your own money, don the startup you had built throughout the years slowly, painfully, until the University took credit for it. *Come on we gave you everything you have to give us something in return, you owe us your life*, your knowledge, your useless youth which will be burned in the altars of exploited labor.

You were nothing but a housemaid of science, and you had believed you were a scientist, a real one, coming every day into the lab to supervise the other students that talked behind your back, concocted a plan to get you sacked. *You are too smart*, they said,

you only represented competition to them. At that moment you wished you had had a video camera, a tape recorder. Now you were starting to believe you were insane. You were sure they couldn't have said something so crude. In a daze, you suddenly recalled the image of your boss threatening to sue you for harassment if you didn't sleep with her. In utter disbelief, paralyzed in the middle of unreality, you had been going to the lab every day for five years, including Sundays. How many times you had slept on the floor, leaving your sleeping bag on the top shelf so you could continue in the morning, classifying new and undiscovered species of fungi, sweating excitedly, thinking how proud your advisor would be, how surprised the International Community. They would make you president of the Worldwide Association, the Center for Scientific Study, the National Fund, they would come flocking from Japan and the US, from Sweden offering you the Nobel Prize, the *honoris causa*, the professorship at Yale. You blink. This is what it all amounts to, your clothes and your sleeping bag lying in a heap. You're barely a hobo, a hobo without a PhD.

They knew if they got you all depressed and defenseless you would not dare sue them, not even dare graduate. You had no chance against the whole Biology Department, the most prestigious in the country. Who was going to believe you anyway? They did not even give you back your petri dishes, your expensive flasks, the mathematical model you came up with to explain the distribution of the *Ajuscii Aureae* in the mesophyll mountain forest, the explanations for the simultaneous apparition of the indigenous

lichens and the invasive blue fungus. The experts had quoted your study a year ago, you had checked the published research paper, saved it as a PDF file. But now they had removed your name from the publication. In disbelief you phoned the magazine, they claimed it had been sent in like that. They had credited all to your boss, who never once expressed his envy. Brainwashed and paranoid, you couldn't even trust your senses now, your garden, the mountains that loomed in your backyard full of moss and entangled microorganisms waiting to be discovered, picked up, analyzed in a microscope. You broke your camera in rage *my life is over*, you stopped talking to your friends. Not even the lab guy who always got in after you at 6 AM and used to bring you coffee seemed to recognize you. As if you had never been there. You were a fallen angel, an uncomfortable ghost.

When you stopped eating, your dog stayed all day by your side as if sensing death. He acted like he feared something about you, whimpering and drooping his ears. You remembered how he had howled all night and run around in circles making a hole in the carpet when your dad was in the hospital. He knew. And now it was you in bed, the place for the ill and the fallen. Eventually, your girlfriend suddenly stopped coming. Your mum brought you food whenever she happened to find you awake. Agonizing at 26, you didn't understand what you had done wrong. At certain moments, you couldn't think anymore, everything was fraught with pain and terror of not returning. Still, you remained unable to leave your massive room that seemed to be growing every day. The noises

of the plants spreading outside started to drive you insane, you screamed believing they had come for you, the professors and your mediocre colleagues sneering at you, dancing like elves in a Walpurgis night, clinking their wine glasses at the unexpected riddance. Your dad had given you the same medicine he had prescribed your grandpa at 85, but you screamed that depression was not a neurodegenerative disease. And yet like your grandfather, you started hearing deafening sounds, huge ants like canons thudding on the roof. You could feel the boom inside your brain, they were creeping out of the ceiling like a black tumor, spreading through the small room in the apartment your parents had next to the university where they worked all their lives. They did not lift a finger to defend you, they were only in meager administrative positions. They had been retired for three years, ejected out of time, incapable of understanding the body of anguish you had become.

You were so alone. Even more than when you were a child and wanted to run away from home. The deaf certainty came over you that there was nowhere to run, nobody, nowhere. You looked at your books in the five bookshelves stacked in the huge room, a wasted past. You had a vision of your father sneering at you when you were a tiny bookworm reading his science books, the same mocking look he gave you fifteen years later when you were an assistant in the lab. *Get a real job* the scathing words burning in your ears, your desperate sleepless nights of untiring compulsive work at 15 wanting to prove him wrong, to prove them all wrong. Reality

screamed back *your intelligence is futile, your talent worthless*. None of your skills were valued in the corporate companies, and yet you thought your madness was some kind of rebellion, the rebellion of your body puking into the toilet, letting go of all the painful years of abuse. The only thing you seemed to know was your refusal to conform, to smile back at the hatchet and the executioner. You would not go back, you would not go, you would not.

The cripple here that you clothe and feed
Is neither starved nor cold
He does not ask for your company
Not at the center, the center of the world

I am not a cripple the Cohen lyrics came in waves like visions of a faraway sanity. You tossed around in your bed thinking of how you had lost the sense of time now that sleep was a privilege you did not deserve, how your body kept freaking out like a clock out of order, not understanding the difference between midnight and 4 AM. You seemed to be living in the threshold of the hours, blurring the lines between wake-up time and the syntax of orderly rest, as if your life no longer had a pause. You could not breathe, lay back and look, stare into the sky for hours and hours. You thought of all the time in your life you had spent watching, just watching the flowers grow, looking at the landscape, waiting for some revelation to come thundering down the mountains, waking up at night to write down the strange visions of sleep when you still were able to remember your fantastic and prodigious dreams.

And now you couldn't remember the smallest inkling of a dream, your whole body paralyzed by fear, a state of permanent suspension, a military commander inside you, shouting fascist orders *no sleep allowed!* Your books could bring no solace, you were only able to dream with reality. Hard as you tried to recover the only place inside you that had been your own, you could no longer hear your own longing. The only place not expropriated by indifferent companies that denied you the right to imagine yourself outside your role as a robot, that requested you kindly leave outside your humanly feelings when entering the office, the classroom, the lab, the country that worked hard to dehumanize you, to make you a sleepless zombie that had forgotten how to sleep, to stare hard at the ocean and the fire until their rhythmic movement would lull you back to the country you'd been expelled from, where the lapping of the water and the crackling of the fire were part of a soothing song, a crooning that refused to be a dirge. You would sing a lullaby for war times, a serenade for a sleepless generation.



RP

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Violeta Orozco is the author of three full-length poetry collections, *The Broken Woman Diaries*, *Stillness in the Land of Speed* (Jacar press, forthcoming), and *El cuarto de la luna* (Proyecto Literal 2020). She is the winner of Jacar's New Voices Poetry Award 2021, judged by Jaki Shelton Green. A diasporic writer, poet and spoken-word artist from Mexico City, she writes in English and Spanish. She lives in Cincinnati, where she is currently pursuing her Ph.D. focused on Creative Writing, Latinx literature and translation. Her poems have been published in *Acentos Review*, *Chicana/Latina MALCS Journal*, *Label Me Latina*, *Harvard's Palabritas*, *Cloud Women's Quarterly Journal*, *A Gathering of the Tribes Online Magazine*, *IceFloe Press* and elsewhere. She is also a literary translator with a monthly column in *Nueva York Poetry Review* where she translates Chicana and Latina literature.

Perla Temoltzin is a visual artist from Mexico City. She majored in Sculpture and graduated from the renowned Escuela Nacional de Pintura, Escultura y Grabado "La Esmeralda" in Mexico City, as well as from UNAM, where she majored in Sociology. She mainly sculpts stone, wood and bronze. Her paintings and sculptures are influenced by pre-columbian aesthetics and worldviews.

Praise for *The Broken Woman Diaries*

Violeta Orozco's *The Broken Woman Diaries* will break you, leave you raw, then stitch you back together, piece by piece, poem by poem. A powerful lyrical meditation on the politics of displacement, the poems take you through intimate albeit precarious landscapes — physical, emotional, sexual — that cut and tear into the bleeding flesh. But it is only through breakage that we can transform, heal, and repair. As Orozco writes, “all this time I was a space/where all the other missing pieces/came together.”

Dr. Victoria Bañales, poet, editor of *Xinachtli Journal* — *Journal X*

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