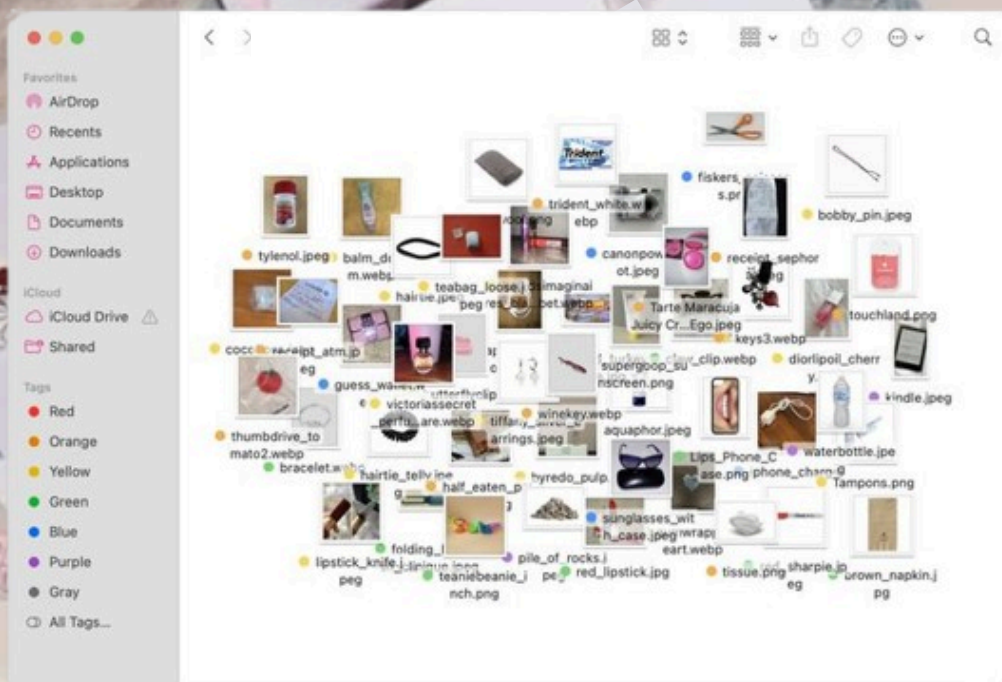


Published Writings by
Marie Anne Arreola
*Selected Works, 2022-
Present*

The Digital Collection



Marie x

About Marie Anne Arreola

Marie Anne Arreola is a bilingual writer, editor, and arts manager whose work exists at the intersection of poetic narrative, cultural criticism, and digital storytelling. She is the founder and editor-in-chief of VOCES, a bilingual digital platform that amplifies emerging and established voices across literature, design, fashion, and music. Under her leadership, VOCES has produced over 40 in-depth interviews with international creatives, including viral influencers, visual artists, and cultural critics, exploring themes of identity, memory, and artistic resistance.

Her writing combines lyrical prose with investigative depth, reflecting on how grassroots artistic expression confronts systems of patriarchy, displacement, and cultural elitism. Marie Anne's bilingual work has been published widely across North America, Latin America, Europe, and Oceania. She is a two-time finalist for the Francisco Ruiz Udiel Latin American Poetry Prize, winner of the Plumas en Ciernes Short Story Prize, and recipient of the 2024 Young Poets Scholarship from Fundación Gutiérrez Lozano. Her work has been recognized internationally for its contribution to contemporary Mexican poetry and literary activism, raising social awareness through poetic language.

Marie Anne holds a B.A. in Arts Management and has pursued formal training in cinematic photography, film production, screenwriting, and journalistic poetry. Her creative practice spans lyric essays, cultural features, and short-form video concepts, often blending memoir with critical reflection.

She is the author of the debut novel Sparks of the Liberating Spirit Who Trapped Us Back in Woodstock (Foresore Publishing, UK), a finalist for the Francisco Ruiz Udiel Latin American Poetry Prize. Her work blends magical realism with poetic prose to explore themes of memory, resistance, and collective liberation.



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A letter from Marie

x

This digital book gathers the work I have published since 2022—a constellation of essays, poems, and fragments tracing how language has carried me through joy, loss, memory, and reinvention. It is both an archive and a threshold: an archive because each piece marks a step in my creative and intellectual journey, and a threshold because they open outward toward new dialogues and possibilities. I want to begin with gratitude. Writing is often imagined as solitary, but every piece that reaches the world does so through the trust and care of others. I am deeply indebted to the editors, professors, colleagues, and readers who have made space for my words across borders. To Professor Javier Gutiérrez Lozano, Albert Brandt, Primavera Encinas, Fernando Valverde, José Paz Rivas, Grace Rojas, Phil M. Shirley, Monserrat Flores, Cristina Escobar, Michell Ortiz, Claudia Ramírez Lomelí, Manuel Parra, Ximena Flores and Cristian Islas—thank you for mentoring, collaborating, and believing in my work. Your support has shown me that literature is not only about solitary expression, but about building a community of voices.

This collection is also a testament to the quiet but transformative labor of independent and university presses. In a landscape often driven by speed and marketability, these spaces remain committed to experimentation, risk, and freedom of expression. They remind us that free speech is not abstract but a practice sustained by editors and publishers who open doors for emerging writers. They do not simply publish; they cultivate possibility.

The journals and presses that welcomed this body of work include Aster Lit, Salt Lake City Community College Review, Dodging the Rain Literary Journal, Chapter House Journal, Waxmark Literary Journal, WILDSOUND Festival, Rowayut Review, San Diego Poetry Annual, Torrey House Press, Wingless Dreamer Publisher, Valparaíso Ediciones, FJORDS Review, The B'K Magazine, University of Houston, Meniscus Literary Journal, Plumas En Ciernes, and Lucky Jefferson. Each represents not just publication, but connection: conversations across geographies that remind us words can travel farther than we ever imagine.

To my readers! ❤️ thank you for arriving here. Whether you've followed my work through these publications or are encountering it for the first time, this zine is offered as a gift. If you are a writer yourself, I hope these pages encourage you to share your voice.

Independent journals thrive because people take that risk, because we dare to believe that words matter. This collection is, finally, a bridge: between past and future work, solitude and community, my voice and yours. Thank you for crossing it with me.

Marie
Anne. A





PRESS

"Marie Anne's work embodies the silenced lives of women victims of femicide in Latin America, raising global awareness about oppression, the absence of legal action, and the sociopolitical reality produced by these crimes that have become an everyday reality throughout Mexico."

– Mortal Magazine

"Marie is a gifted storyteller whose bold and inventive writing illuminates and expands our understanding of the physical and spiritual world in which we live."

– Phil M. Shirley, Foreshore Publishing, UK

"Once again, Marie Anne manages to unveil the everyday. Her written word materializes what every human being perceives unconsciously. In a world where each day overtakes the one before it, where natural sounds and landscapes are on the verge of extinction, where humans privilege the use of emojis and abbreviations, her poetry is a mirror that reflects what we see without pausing to look."

– Revista Digital Cinco Pétalos

"Her fiction succeeds on many levels, as it focuses on our roots in Northern México. It becomes inevitable to mention agriculture as one of the foundations of family economy, especially in earlier times."

– Revista Perlas del Desierto

"As a Mexican writer, Marie brings to her work the energy of a pioneer for the Latin American community, and the voice of an activist on behalf of poetry, creativity, and spirituality."

– Wingless Dreamer Publisher

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"Are we ever the same person twice?" Aster Lit Honorable Mention

TW: paranoia, failure, existential dread, tangled neurons, fangled neurons, viscous boundaries, dystopian landscapes, parallel universes, breath-holding, death-beholding, and the type of love that makes you speak in tongues or fall silent completely. What are we really doing when we hug? Are we testing the tensile strength of skin? Measuring the radius of absence between two people? I keep thinking it's a ritual. A ceremony not just of connection but containment; a way of cradling the unspeakable without letting it leak. Did I say unspeakable horrors? Because that's what this is about. That tight-chested moment of intimacy when you're holding someone who doesn't know how to say, I think I'm unraveling, but you feel it anyway. The silent sobs that show up in the neck, in the way their hands rest not on your back but against it, as if touch itself is a decision they're trying to survive.

I have wanted, more than once, to unzip my lover's skull and walk in with a flashlight.

Cartoon plumber style. Blue overalls, rubber gloves, a toolbox full of nervous jokes and sugar packets. Not to fix him, just to look around. Dust the attic corners. Light some candles. Scribble something on a post-it and stick it on the hippocampus. But how do you love a clump of synapses that fire like fireworks in a hurricane? That confuses hunger with grief, joy with warning bells? The science offers neat lines and graphs –"what fires together wires together"–as if brains are code, not narrative. As if a human being were a flowchart instead of a flickering, half-remembered prayer. Spoiler: the melding of souls is final.



Or maybe just
a hoax. I want to believe in it,
though. I want to believe we're
not just falling toward each
other in the dark, trying to
guess where our edges begin. That
maybe we are matched messes.
Fellow travelers through the
static. Like we showed up on this
timeline with coordinated
neuroses for a reason.

I remember being four in scraps—
an orange carpet like a
psychedelic tide, a stereo that
gleamed like a spaceship. I
remember building Lego versions
of sacred places: my mother's
silence, the hallway I'd sprint
through when no one was watching,
the bathroom where I
practiced disappearing. My body
remembers joy in glimmers—my
brother somersaulting
backwards off my shoulders,
squealing something that sounded
like flight. But I can't access
the interior of that child. Only
her echoes. Only the ghost of
what she might've believed.

Maybe that's what memory is. A
haunted archive. We remember the
shadow the moment cast
more than the moment itself. A
love-shaped outline, but never
the pulse. And so we try to
recreate it with hugs, with
rituals, with absurdities.
Absurdity is a kind of coping.
That's why
I say things like I want Idris
Elba to handle the snakes for me.

Because the snakes—fear,
memory, panic, shame—they writhe
quietly under my ribs, and I
think he would know how to
charm them. Or at least look good
while trying.

Once, I dreamt of a snake. Thin
as a vein, colored like copper
and apple peel. It slithered
toward me not with menace, but
purpose. Like it knew my name.
Like it had traveled
centuries just to remind me of
something I forgot on purpose. It
slid up my arm like a
sentence, whispered itself into
the spiral of my ear. I woke up
with teeth marks I couldn't
explain. Some people have a clean
line to their past selves. They
say the child is father of the
man. That they can trace
themselves back like a river to
its spring. I envy that. I'm a
divider.

A splintered self. My child-self
feels like a foreign film I
watched too young, dubbed badly
into a language I still don't
quite speak. I ask her in dreams:
were you real? Were you me? Or
a draft I abandoned mid-revision?

Lately, my brain feels like a
recycling bin of metaphors:
origami folds, missed
connections,
misfiring fireflies. I say things
like: mountain fold, valley fold,
squash, petal, reverse swivel,
and nothing beautiful comes of
it. My metaphors pile up like
crumpled paper.

I want to make
a swan. I get a soggy cube. I
hold plates I should let go of. I
carry conversations like
landmines. I mix up tenderness
with tension. I want my inner
operations to feel like water
again. Wet-folded, smooth,
inevitable. Like a woman in love
with the motion of her own
body, pouring tea, planting
basil, saying yes without needing
to justify it.

I want the way I love to be
ceremonial. Not performative, but
sacred in its absurdity. Like
breathing into a storm and
expecting it to soften. And so I
hug. Often. Without needing to
solve anything. Without fixing or
folding or interpreting. Maybe
hugs are how we say, I see
it. The fracture. The fire. The
snake with its many names. I've
got one too. Maybe it's not
about merging or saving, but
about witnessing. And maybe being
capable of saying me too
with our arms instead of our
mouths-is the closest we get to
actual magic.



"American Horror Story" Salt Lake City Community College

I know my age by counting the
cracks webbed across my knees—
tiny maps no one follows.
Prayers split open like overripe
lemons,
acid pooling along the seams. We
forgot who we were,
how many gods we begged by name
before the bridge buckled,
the faithful stampeding, sandal
straps snapping like twigs.
I'm sorry I let the rope tied in
a bow above my sister's body—
a remembrance ribbon to soften
the hard facts.
It must have been torture, to
watch hope swing
and still not save yourself.
Sissy, I'm sorry. Your blood is
syrup now.
Your needles line the bathroom
counter like a miniature picket
fence.
Mom—if you'd remembered the
Prozac more often,
I wouldn't have switched your
pills for sugar.
I thought it was funny, like
planting jelly beans in the
garden
to grow candy trees. It wasn't
funny. It was July, and the air
burned with metal and clover.
That summer, I wore a striped
bathing suit.

You promised we'd ride
bicycles to the beach. We never
did. The sun fell—
hard and heavy—every night at
the windowsill.
We counted it down like a
funeral, waiting for an even
date,
an odd date that felt like
breathing. It wasn't your
fault, Mom.
I didn't know how tremors
start in the brain like radio
static,
how you pressed your hands
against the glass—
not to clean it, but to hold
yourself inside.
We never saw a dolphin. We saw
the house bleach itself raw—
mirrored floors, lemon-
polished sadness.
The glitter beyond the trees?
Not magic. Just taillights.
More people leaving. Now I
drive to sip your grief like
sacrament.
We are human because sadness is
a hunger,
because a girl can turn into
reeds,
still get plucked and played
for someone else's song..

It was never kill people, burn
shit, fuck school-
until it was. We grew up too
fast-repel money, eat garbage,
fuck off before you can't
anymore. Little girl like
paradigm, like parasite.
Twist the finger. Pop the
blister. It gets exhausting,
lying so hard your mouth tastes
like pennies and old rain.
Crawl through the keyhole. Do not
resuscitate.

For fear I missed the best part-
the part that might have been
love.

I tied your hands behind your
back like a game of mercy.

Entered you, each breath hollow
as a drumbeat,

thinking only of the ache I
couldn't name.

I never memorized the Act of
Contrition. But I cried when I
lost

my yellow umbrella, watched it
tumble down the street like a
broken star.

And still-I keep the yellow
umbrella in my mind's coat
closet,

next to the rope ribbon, next to
the swimsuit I outgrew

before I ever got wet. All of it
waits for me: the sugar pills,
the spotless floors,

the ghost of a dolphin beneath
the glassy sea. Some days I
forgive myself.

Some days I mistake memory for
prophecy. But always,

I walk backward through the
house,

saying all our names like a
spell that might one day work

"Nosebleed / I swear I wasn't that sad / Destinies" Dodging the Rain Literary Journal

NOSEBLEED

Do you think I'll ever learn
to make my heart beat in time?

The ceiling fan doesn't answer,
just spins like it has somewhere
to be.

Last night the air came in
carrying a secret,
brought her scent with it

warm skin
and something like daisies,
if daisies were people
who used to love you.

Isn't it strange,
the way the past doesn't die,
just rebrands, shows up clearer
than the face of the man
at the DMV who said
I look quietly upset.

Memory is a watercolor,
sure. But not just smudged,
it bleeds into the shape
of something you'd cry into
a napkin about, at lunch.

I rolled over onto your carpet
like a body being bagged.
I memorized your ceiling
and thought about all the cells

I've left in other people's
rooms,
as if my DNA is out there
testifying against me.

Now that you want someone else,
my lungs work again.
No more CPR from the ghost
of your approval.

Nothing to wait for or admit.
Except maybe
that I was the janitor
of your absence.
And I did sweep,
I did mop.

I laid my guts out
on the shelf at Walgreens
between vitamin D and cough
drops.

Glowing, ridiculous.
Second place in my own story,
participation trophy for
desire.

That fear—remember it?
The soft one,
the whisper-fear
that keeps you in the waiting
room
instead of the dream itself?

Yeah, I had it.
I still have it.

It ruined the dream
which only comes back
when I sleep
like a childhood friend
who still calls me
by my full name.

Just yesterday
I passed the street
where we met.

It felt like walking
into a version of myself
who hadn't yet
cracked open.

I wanted to go back,
to meet you again
as a stranger.

To admire your nose
like a small sculpture
I can't afford.

To let you buy me a drink
and pretend this was easy.
But it isn't, and never was.

There are days
I feel like Terri Schiavo
for the emotionally literate.
No plug, no God,
just a crowd of onlookers
debating if I'm still in there.

The exhaustion
of being alive
in this soft
constant way.

I wish I didn't remember
the nosebleed
at the rest stop,
the ice-cream on ice-cream
in New Jersey
like flavor could save us.

You know,
the sweetest part
was always how we talked.

The way we folded
into silence like it was
another kind of kiss.

You could've told me
you wanted out.
You could've said,
I'm packing the good knives
and this version of myself.

I would've understood,
I think.
I just wanted a sentence.

Now
I can't inhale
without thinking
of fresh blood.

TELL
HER,
YOU
LOVE
HER

Ihre Telekom
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I SWEAR, I WASN'T THAT SAD

The bee sting you got
running barefoot one summer
through a meadow so green it
hummed,
so wide it must have thought it
was forever.

That sting now rings the church
bells,
plays the organ softly before
Sunday sermon.

It trims the shrubs out front,
paints the fence
white as a hymn, rinses the
windows
with vinegar and rag,
sweeps the steps in a motion
you might call prayer.

All that pain became
someone's maintenance.

That's what memory does—
turns wounds into workers.

And how, you ask me,
do you get back inside
the hive of that mind?

How do you undo
what the imagination has built
out of smoke?

I wore a flak jacket,
had in mind to drop a few bills
into the offering plate—

a kind of joke, maybe,
or a bargain: God,
forgive me in small bills.

I pray for myself
because I know it hurt.
I would like to make it up to
you.

I mean it in the way
the poor juggler meant it
in that Christmas tale

no gift to bring
but the only thing he knew:
to enter the dark church,
face the cradle, and juggle
in the silence.

We call that story beautiful,
call it redemption,
but also, isn't it
a little bit desperate?

Maybe all art is like that—
some trembling attempt
to juggle fire in front of God.

To say: I know how violent I
am.

Watch me make it pretty
before I drop it.

I think play is part of it.
So is rage.
The desire to make something
still
out of what wants to be a
storm.

And compassion—

don't forget it cages the word
compass,
a way to find north
in the middle of a broken
instrument.

I have tried to use the stars.
I still remember
everything I read about
constellations,
even now.

Even here, in the age
where faith comes cheaper
than bullets.

I keep looking up,
thinking maybe
they'll rearrange themselves
into a shape that makes sense.

Or at least into
the meadow again.
That sting. The church.

The boy running barefoot
before the world
learned to alter shuffle.

DESTINIES

Can we watch *La La Land* again-
you on your couch, me on mine,
a shared tab open across the
fracture
of our new addresses?

I'll send the link.
Netflix Party makes it sound
festive,
like a birthday or a wake.
We'll press play at the same
time,
sync our screens
so Ryan Gosling learns to dance
again
while Emma Stone forgets
she ever dreamed of Paris.

From here, my place feels too
white,
like a gallery with none
of our framed chaos. You
remember
Maliboo Beach? I still call it
that

after I took the spirit box to
the shore-
cheap plastic ghost-hunting
gear,
but it caught something that
sounded
like our laughter. I thought
it was the ocean mimicking us.

I remember Halloween,
the one where we dressed as the
Warrens,
me handing out candy and
watching
you hold it all together
the way some people hold sand.

I sent you that clip the other
day.
No signal, or maybe
the universe intercepted it.

Still, I imagine the film
we'd shoot now:
you, rearranging your bookshelf
so the titles make sense again.

I'm still learning how to soften
without turning off the lights.
What's left to filter through?

Maybe nothing, or maybe just
that we rewind not to return,
but to remind.

Have you spoken to your father?
Does he still find me charming?

Do you?



"The Grammar of Collapse" Chapter

House Journal

The street isn't silent. It only feels that way when the algorithm skips a beat, when the sky hums overhead like a glitch in the stream, when I walk and remember I am a body—not just a profile—visible, fragile, surrounded by other breakable things. Sometimes the light catches my cheek in the reflection of a storefront window, and I think: this is me. I am legitimate. I didn't create a thing, but I inhabit it.

Culture feels like a pot of new emergencies—simmering, blistering, constantly asking to be stirred.

I grew up in a border city, where silence was always a kind of code-switching—bilingual, half dust, half signal. Sonora, a state where fences aren't just physical lines but psychic ones. There, I learned early that language is not merely communication. It is adaptation. A survival instinct. It bends around wire fences, flattens itself against legal frameworks. It is the breath between Spanish and English, the syllables that slip in translation and refuse to be fully caught. My childhood was shaped by that tension: a place where belonging is never given, only earned through constant negotiation.

This experience echoes the broader realities of borderlands worldwide, where cultural and political boundaries impose limits on identity and expression. Scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa have long described this space as "la frontera," a liminal zone of hybridity and tension. In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa writes, "I am a border woman. I grew up between two cultures... I am a mestiza, a crossblood."

Her work underscores that survival in such spaces requires fluency in ambiguity, the art of living in and between worlds.

I watched friends burn out like cassette tapes, worn down by too much rewind. That was before the mechanisms failed. Before time began to bite back.

Now, I write poems like border crossings. They dissolve boundaries and resist clean translation. They ask questions in lowercase and never wait for answers. They braid the sacred with the digital, the domestic with the mythic.

In recent years, the cultural fallout of political crises—mass migration, environmental disasters, the pandemic—has further fractured what it means to belong and be heard. As NPR reported in 2023, border communities endure “layered violence,” where systemic neglect intersects with personal trauma, yet “creativity and community remain acts of resistance.” This resilience is a form of cultural grammar: a way to narrate survival without surrendering to despair.

I’ve become a chronicler of thresholds; feminine, oneiric, always slightly undone. In the art world, I look for the red knuckles of prizefighters. For barbed wire baked into frosted cakes. I trace the outlines of transgression. I ask: What laws have I broken without being caught? What pulls your gaze in a time when attention is currency?

Is culture the shape we make in the air when we resist? Can we prefigure liberation, as if resistance were not just a performance, but a blueprint?

The border taught me that survival is never static. It is movement. It is the constant weaving between worlds, the art of holding multiple identities that never fully fit the frame. This is the grammar of collapse—a language born in the ruins but spoken in the present tense.

In the online forums of the dead, real or imagined, I read the dispatches of those yearning for precision in their undoing. One voice types, “I’m trying to listen, to let go of being heard.” Another answers: “Hold fast to death, for if death dies, death is a broken-winged bird that cannot fly.”

These aren’t metaphors. They are liturgies. Instructions for those of us who have lived through collapse and found a strange kind of grace in the wreckage.

What does a people look like after surviving every ending?

What grammar do we write in, having grown up always on camera?

We’re in a room, drinking legacy-brand cocktails. We forget, then remember, that everything we consume is engineered for both

pleasure and disappearance. We are dancing beneath violet bar lights, talking about Clarice Lispector and Beyoncé. We are building something. We are undoing something. We say we run the world, but we know who profits from the illusion of our power. We stitch resistance into red patches from Jo-Ann Fabrics. We love you, Jo-Ann. And we are never going to be quiet. We are expressive and strategic in our artificial cages, in our aestheticized restraints. We want surveillance to witness us in bloom. We want the archive to remember us as difficult, poetic, and free. The global rise of surveillance culture, as documented by scholars like Shoshana Zuboff in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, shows how digital life reshapes our identities into data points. Yet within this, artists—particularly those from marginalized communities—turn visibility into a weaponized act of affirmation. To be seen fully is to resist erasure. To become mayor of this ruin, I did yoga in the dark gardens of capitalism. I laughed with ghosts. My politics is not only survival, it is intimacy. It is the radical act of feeling in an era that numbs, of writing in an era that consumes. It is the refusal to be easy. It is waking to no change—just light stuck to the windowpane. Still, we stitch. We whisper through screens. We kiss each other's foreheads in dreams. Yes, culture is a pot of new emergencies. But it is also the smoke that rises from that pot. The songbird between silences. The dance in the burning house. The thread that says: we were here. We saw you. We lived.



"Conversions mid Conversation"

Waymark Literary Journal

And by that,
what I meant was:
I look at my bowl of soup before
bed—
not as food,
but as a variable—
something that shifts,
like me,
growing more fluid
like how I exist in the world.

I've learned that surrendering
to intuition
is its own kind of thinking.
My question mark
is a shovel:
not seeking an answer,
but a deeper root
still willing to move.

Halfway through a conversion,
a conversation:
something rearranges,
something settles inside the
unstable.
Arguments are travelers too—
they change with time,
as the wind reshapes me
when I allow it through.

I'm okay being an enigma—
at least one that's learned
how to walk toward something.

Walking into autumn,
I tried to think
without taming the thought:
a conversation that braided
debate,
a salt-sweet night soup
seasoned with echoes of the
gone.
The garnish: a sunset
floating in the bowl.

I learned that sometimes
the spoon isn't on the table,
but in bed,
holding another's body
as if it, too,
were a form of prayer.

To know the essence of a
feeling
that vanishes,
then returns,
like smoke rising before a fire
where stories are slow-cooked.

Wholeness, I found,
is a strict subject—
like time.
And my detours,
they carry me too.
And I let them.

"Woodstock" WILDSOUND FESTIVAL, Nature Poem Selection

In my hometown,
winter was a fairy tale.
The concept of time,
a rising curve,
capturing
our attention with its hook.
In the midst of this thought,
I want to pause at the climax,
as if watching
the story that lies beyond,
at the end of the slide.
Yesterday
I was calculating the rest of the
day
with a glitch in my system.
The frozen dawn in the darkness,
back to old times,
hanging out in isolated cabins-
kerosene lamps, lit up candles,
those wood stoves that always
work.
The rest of my friends like
little shadows
in the middle of the campsite. In
our town,
the old, renewed winter was a
fairy tale,
and I tried to remember that
machinery
can always be fixed-I thought
we'd have to be ready
to forgo some of the day's plans,
and return to our manuals,
or call our parents for
instructions

to make a bit more tea,
and relax with our limited
tools
and our problems.

Each winter, the wet earth
devours the gravel,
so reserving some fixed paths
for torrential rains and melted
snow
requires planning. Yesterday
I was calculating the rest of
the day
with a glitch in the system,
but back to energy-
I'll change the batteries
next time and get some spares
with a block of cast iron;
I'll add a bunch more solar
panels.
My friends decided to warm the
edges of the cabin
by moving a few feet away,
burning pine boards
for their candles. Trapped
among the woods,
listening to the whispers of
the breeze,
stuck in Woodstock-
as free as we could be,
with canned food munitions
and our weekend itinerary,
without needing the campfire to
convey
the tales of some winter

even as the falling flakes
became a mass,
their individuality erased
in a flurry of white snow.
Orion, Pleiades opening
constellations
in the dark, while the group
recalls
old anecdotes from when we were
younger—
a conjugation of time's frame,
decorated by a white glow on the
hills
while we barely distinguish
their silhouettes afar, trying to
count
the stars as they fade like
light.

From the east comes a sudden wind
that wakes us;
we, diurnal beings,
greet the star
fading in the distance,
as another splendor
is about to begin the morning.
Cold dawn in the darkness,
back to old times;
kerosene lamp, candles,
wood stoves that always worked.
The rest of my friends
as little shadows outside the
cabin,
their heads covered in Eskimo
hats,
living a wisdom
that is far off—

awareness has a distinctive
form.
Our present selves,
empty and formal in their
discourse;
these character arcs,
so deep and superficial.
A spark of a liberating spirit
that traps us
back in Woodstock.

NOTE:

DATE

ORIGINAL

CHECK

DO
NOT
MAKE
SETTLE-
MENT
ON
THIS
PORTION

Signature of individual
or person in charge

Ticket Numbers

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"MAPS" Rowayatt Review

When I was six, my father threw
me
into the deep end of the pool. No
warning.
No story before impact.
The floatie on my left arm
slipped off
like it, too, wanted to abandon
me.
I remember water entering my
nose,
the blue swallowing me whole,
the sound of the surface growing
distant.
It was September, 2004. The
water, cold.
Me, a trembling twig
clinging to the half of me still
floating.
I kicked my way back.
Dad only asked:
Where's your other floatie?
As if it hadn't been his hand
that turned me into a meteor.
Now that I think of it,
I was the one who convinced him—
Throw me, Dad, I said, I want to
learn.
Maybe I've always had it in me,
a tendency to leap without a
parachute,
as if the world were a story
begging to be heard
and I, a boy collecting versions

of what it means
to make it out alive.

I could tell you how I learned
to reroute
my dopamine receptors; how I
drew invisible trails
between my need for adrenaline
and the tenderness I left
somewhere—
as if it were possible to draw
maps
that hold both: the collapse
and the celebration.
I swear it's no coincidence
my memory is made
of pools, elevators,
airports where nothing arrives
on time
except fear.

Always those straight lines
going up
or down. Always that vertigo
like an old voice repeating my
name
with thirst.
It's not that I prefer the
desert,
but there's something honest in
it
that calls to me.
A place without lies. No water,
but no shadow either,
sometimes an oasis hides there,

sometimes it's just a version of
yourself
waiting for you to arrive alone.
It's scary, but there's warmth,
too,
a silence that doesn't judge.

And if I map out how I've made it
here,
you'll see there's always a
coordinate
pointing upward—as if the sky
were the only place
where those of us who almost
drowned
can finally rest.



"Yesterday in the garden I saw you" San Diego Poetry Annual

It caught my eye through the
steamy window—
a tender moon, nearly submerged
beneath the hemispheres,
a land of onions, carrots,
tomatoes waiting for the call
of time to harvest. My father, a
darkened figure,
moves through rural rituals
before morning begins.

(Have I used the word theory for
a phantom?) Barefoot, I step
outside with coffee, shovels— the
usual things.

A bird flurries nearby. Memory,
always ready to erase,
leaves me. So instead, I draw
myself into that garden,
into the untouched golden fields
of the mind's portrayal.

Beautiful buried seeds begin to
sprout, a supernatural symmetry
frames the scene. My father
exhales a smoky cloud.

I carry the basket inside where
we reunite in the kitchen—

Mum, Dad, me. My tennis shoes
muddy,

their faces thoughtful, sweat
glistening a moment

before it fades. Here, for the
first time in a while,

I glimpse the end. It was sunny
one evening, years ago.

The heat touched my skin—
tanning.

If I wasn't burned, some
passing shadow

must have shielded me.

Probably the clouds.

While knitting like a spider
again in my childhood bedroom,

I finally understand that
there's another kind of seeing—
one that requires letting go.
I'm behind the steamy window.

My father has been dead two
days. My mother knocks once,
then enters slowly. She wraps
me in a hug.

And I think: Let this be how I
go— enveloped,

sent off softly when my time
arrives.

I could not outwit the laws of
zombies.

I cannot rebel against the
waking fatality.

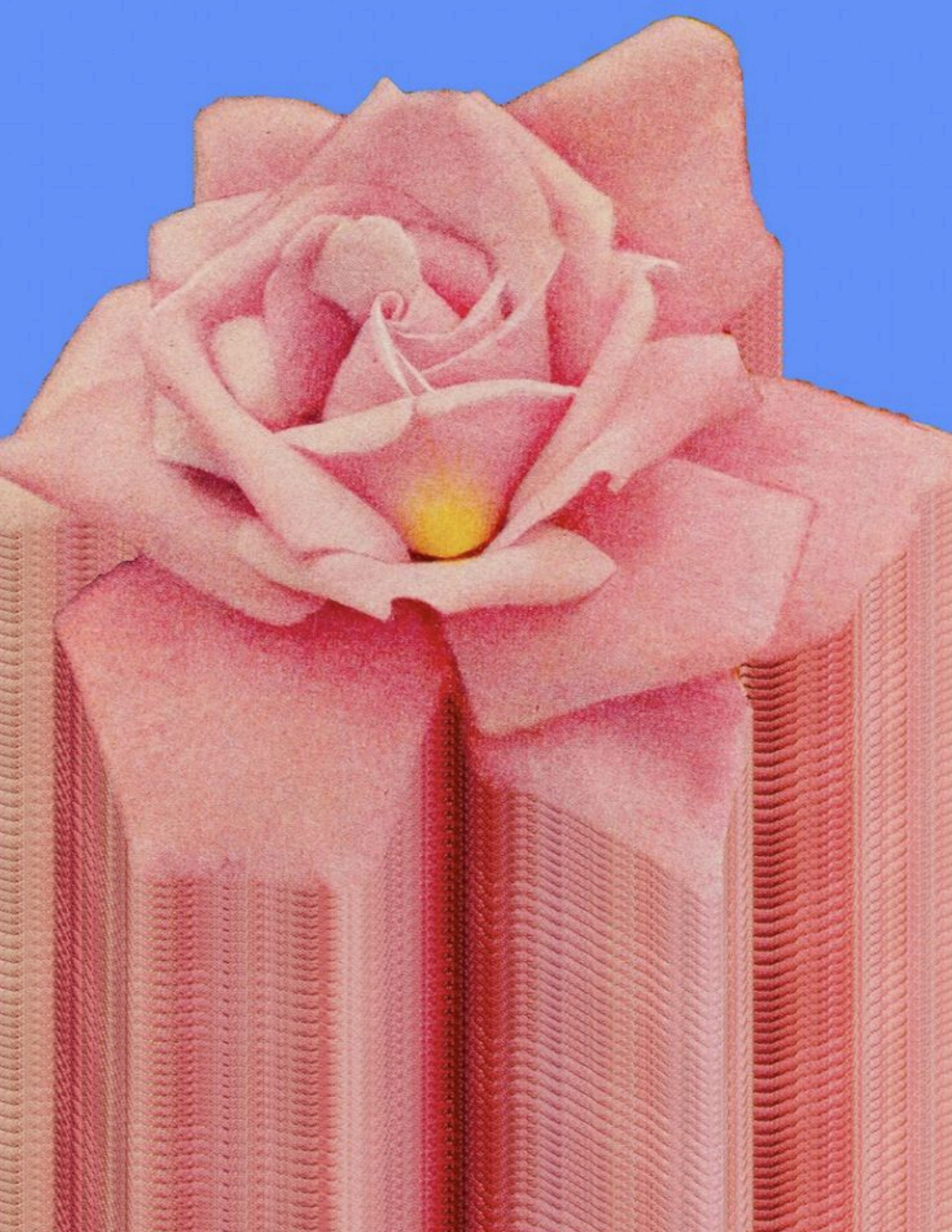
The sun fires like a pistol
into every surrounding world.

Then: white specks. Dry petals,
maybe, drifting through fields,
falling. I look to the brim of

my hat— the tender moon,
and growing vegetables.

Yesterday,

in the garden, I saw you.



"A Movie Called Honeycomb"

Torrey House Press

There was a busyness inside the honeycomb—yes, a little rush,
like a hive of blurred movements, wings too fast to see.
You could call that a business. But what I meant was:
that day held a heaviness in the air. Was it the weight of our sorrow—
or the end of it? The honeycomb was visible from our window.
There was always something happening in there.
Every day felt like an anniversary of the dying earth.
The bees were busy. Making rounds. Taking turns. All before we could
face
our ecological responsibilities. We saw the tree. We saw the honeycomb.
A hundred intentions to preserve the green. Flying insects—
we feared them only. Dust of a month. Crickets singing night and day.
Anniversary of the dying earth. Busyness inside a honeycomb.
We saw the world in snapshots—a photo album mirroring
our discomfort. Wings laboring over the yard.
So much to say. Too little to do. Most houses nearby
are dark now.
Across my window, beneath the streetlight,
I'm watching a movie about the urge to save the world—
a movie that's always about to begin.

"Song of Splendor" Wingless Dreamer Publisher

The doctors reached into me as if I were a drawer of lost tools,
searching for instruments scattered in the corridors of my throat.
They wanted the words lodged behind my baby teeth—
those soft fossils half-formed and already fractured.
The diagnosis was a dissection:
open the child, study the silence.
But something flared there,
not pain exactly, more like music breaking open—
a violin planted deep beneath the tongue,
its roots gripping the soft dark of my palate,
filling the hollow with the aching vowels of my name.
My surname did not arrive quietly.
It howled, not to be healed,
but to be heard.
In families like mine,
where borders are stitched and re-stitched into the body,
biology is just another way of reinvention—
naming the blood not by science,
but by the songs it remembers.



"The Dead Rise Again in
November" Francisco Ruiz Udiel
Latin American Poetry Prize Nom.
V, Valparaíso
Ediciones

I

The sun pours itself across the
Sea of Cortez,
a broken yolk smearing gold along
the water,
as tourists lean into the rusted
rail
of the Mirador de San Carlos—
wanting nothing, only light,
only the relief of radiance.
It isn't a question of why.
The sun doesn't explain itself.
It wakes, like us,
from some unmeasured sleep
and does its part:
to burn, to hold vigil,
to shine without asking
permission.
And beneath it, a glint of
centuries—
tribes and doorways and nausea
like a rope pulled from the gut—
that strange sickness
that comes with glimpsing
a past too near.

The chest learns to house
a second heartbeat.
We wear our souls backwards,
as if they were shirts
we forgot how to button.

II

In November, the culture wakes
first.
Painted skulls dangling in
place of wind,
marigold paper peeling
at the corners of homemade
altars,
photographs reprinted
for the sake of remembering
what cannot quite be recovered.
A child runs in with pan de
muerto
and lays it beside his
grandfather's
dust-caked cowboy hat.
And maybe later,
he'll dream up the myth of a
man

who rode horses through silence,
who watched clouds split open
above a ranch that no longer
exists.

That's how the ethos begins:
invention posing as memory.
History's earliest trick.

III

This has little to do with gods
and more with echoes.

The way we become part
of some wounded largeness—
a place we cannot name,
but feel humming
beneath our heels.

How a bare stone under sun
tells you about erosion
the way bones
remember warmth.

We invent glass
because we want to see
through ourselves.

I follow a trail of footprints
that split into every possible
version.

IV

Spring has its own resurrections.
Another field of meaning
stitched into our folklore,
another excuse to mark
our mystery with celebration.
We host birthday parties
for versions of ourselves
we no longer recognize.

Then the quiet arrives.
We sit with ourselves
like guests in our own homes.
Do you remember
how we placed time on a shelf
just long enough to
feel infinite?
Shook it like a jar of
fireflies—
watched it glitter
with the promise of dusk
or the eyelash of morning.
Tick. Tock.
Each second a small sun
inside the body
until the body remembered
it was borrowed.
Even on the day I was born,
the sun trembled—
as if it knew something I
didn't,
as if it blinked
before becoming a spectacle.

V

I read once:
Death does not hide.
It waits. Patient. Exact.
A gentle tap on the shoulder,
a draft at your back.
It doesn't need to knock.
And when it comes,
we lend it our intuition,
our softest thread of
evolution.
We have attended
a thousand wakes.
Two thousand years,
and still the echo.

A language of strands,
braided backward-
not stairs,
but a ladder we forgot to
descend.
The body is not a mistake.
Nor the timing.
Nor the day.
On November 2nd,
maybe the veil splits a little,
just enough
for the soul to slip
from its cocoon-
a small practice for the end
that isn't an end.

VI

And again,
the sun coming through.

"A Thin film of forgetting"

FJORDS Review

Your mind will abbreviate the summary. Probably draw a crust around the planet's rim. It'll detect the curve and maneuver slowly. It'll dig a hole. Toss the pot. And call it evolution. There's a layer of dust on my books. That's what growing up looks like. A thin film of forgetting, coating the things that used to matter enough to underline. Nature hums the same lullaby, again and again-like it knows we forgot the lyrics, but it doesn't mind. For months I think about the seed inside the flower. I think about myself, assembled from the leftovers of a lonely star. I begin to meditate.

So?

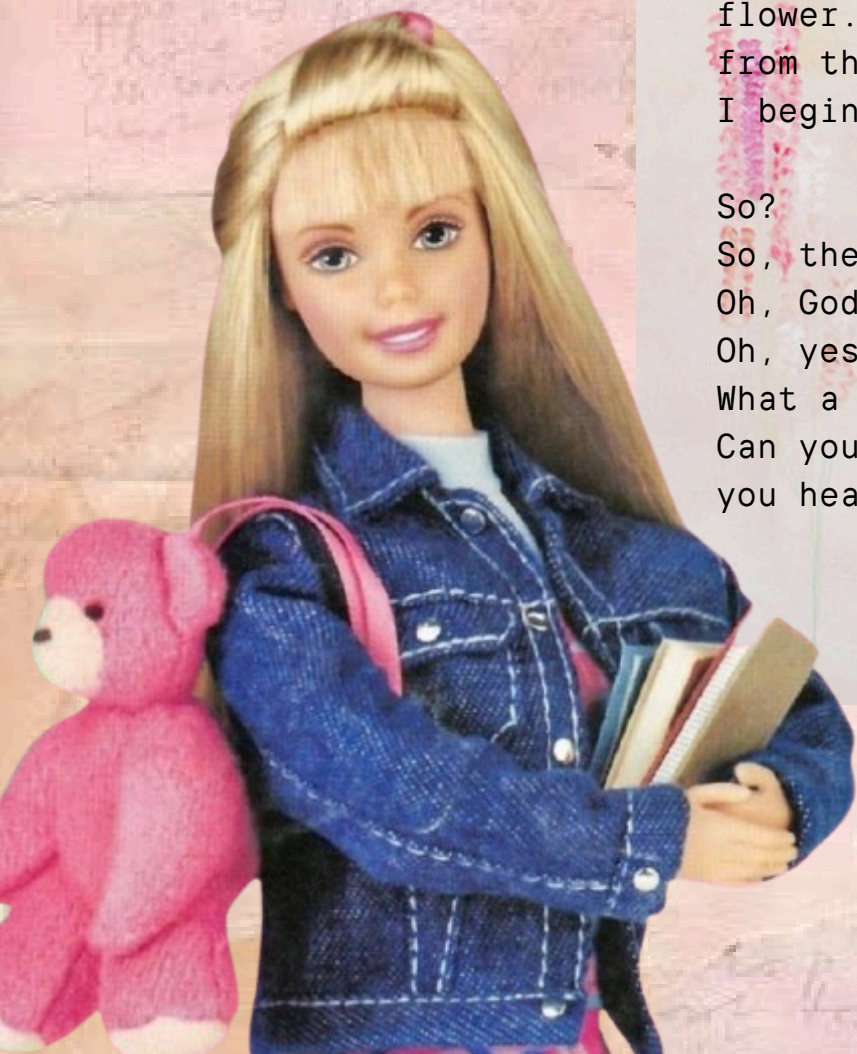
So, the truth is: you fall in love.

Oh, God.

Oh, yes.

What a surprise.

Can you hear the bells? No, really. Can you hear them?



"Haste" Francisco Ruiz Udiel

Latin American Poetry Prize Nom.

VI, Valparaíso Ediciones

I

Psychic or cyclic,
the stages of my life keep
turning.

I breed a new desire to fail,
a new desire to learn. I take
each lesson

with spirit, bent sideways by
the thrill it sheds.

I think I'd notice if I were
caught in a trap.

Companion or villain, I'm
stitched into the fibers of
stories.

I multiply my existence along
the strings
of other people's lives. However
freeing that sounds,
my mind always seems to find a
corner
where explosions of cognition
and expansion
are too dense to set aside.

II

Among other things I've learned
so far:
a mistake in front of the mirror
is to seek the familiar
when I know revelation is the
true reward.

The rhetoric of my life seems
to swell into hyperbole
soon to shrink by half. I'm
the driver
in charge of plotting the road
ahead—
and that is why I'm obsessed
with myself,
and that is why I slip away
from social life
to return to these
introspective pursuits
that haven't expired—
for the nights I lie in bed
thinking through the riddle of
my own existence.

It embarrasses me a little.
Psychic or cyclic, my love for
the world
is a duty that feels
ridiculously personal;
it isn't enough to turn away
and ignore the universe that
lives inside my body:
the logical and the emotional,
threads of thought scripted in
my DNA.
Because I seek the detection
of gems embedded within me,
I also feel compelled to carry
across
the worth of these sculpted

diamonds
in translation, using the word
as a mechanism to cope
with the beauty I inhabit.
And I know there's a gentler way
to mold a phrase, and send this
out.

III

Some days the night is calm,
and on others, I lull the moon
to sleep.
The shadowed side darkens my
face.
It's a constant riddle, and the
only answer
is to follow the momentary
numbness
with a ration of a little more
life.
Daily life as remedy,
dragging you from the coma;
daily duty to jolt you
out of paralysis-hypnosis,
maybe?
To feel this biological pattern
of waking.
I rise and fall, as anyone might.
I hit my lowest point
the year depression settled in.
How lucky I am
to have a second pair of hands,
to have you; my anchor to
reality
is the repeated desire to get
dressed,
to show up to the new day
by your side.
Only then I understood these
partial obsessions

with morality, logic, and
thought
are what ultimately tuck me
in.

IV

There's still so much left to
write
in the bibles of our lives.
A sketch of symbols
and the bones of beasts
toward which we'll turn our
heads.
Maybe it's a matter of safety:
drawing our little selves
in shining armor
facing dragons.
Maybe it's a matter of mind...
building a temple to rest in
after our physical guard
fades.
The train comes at blistering
speed,
the transport that asks a
ticket
from our soul once we leave
this cage
of the body, an old shell.
Once the other side is
revealed.

V

Meanwhile, summer is ending
and a region of the planet
burns.
It lives inside a verse:
adversity
captured from the month when
we hiked
and you twisted your left

ankle, and I carried you home
to lift you into the car.
I recall an old woman in the
waiting room
asking if I was awaiting the
result
of a surgery. And when I didn't
nod,
she politely asked me to hold
her hands
and pray for the families nearby
who weren't as lucky.
I saw the pain in my body.
In the hospital waiting room I
was
at once naked and safe.
I heard the words she chose
to describe me: fortunate,
golden.
And then I wished I could tell
her I'm
an amateur hiker of Septembers,
walking out past the city limits
in light rain, my subtle
confrontation
to reach the hilltop; a small
challenge.
I liked sunsets,
twilight scented with
wildflowers—
not the most dazzling, but
rather
steeped in intelligence by
appetite,
rooted year by year in yellow
grass.
Whatever god exists
was with you in the passenger
seat,

your ankle aching after the
fall.
Everything becomes real so
fast,
so in moments of reflection,
I wish less. What is here is
not, isn't it?
And what truly exists lies out
of reach,
like first light traveling
over us,
beyond our thoughts or
intentions.

VI

I think I've agreed, in this
same sense,
with the abundance and good
fortune of the world,
without fully accepting the
cruelty inside the frame of
things,
and the idea of God the
monster, but rather
continuing my ritual of bowing
my head
whenever something tragic, or
magnificent, happens.
Though I'll never truly know
the rewards
or punishments of standing
firm
in the middle ground—somewhat
deaf, somewhat numb—
when the biggest questions are
raised.
There are many notes to write
in the footnotes
of our bibles; observations
that corrode the use of reason
and sketch a first approach

to the fields of sacred faith.
Maybe it's a matter of safety:
drawing our little selves in
gleaming armor,
facing dragons.

VII

Meanwhile, summer has ended
and a region of the planet is
scorched.
September arrived cluttered with
metaphor
and a river of ideas that set
sail
toward tired commonplaces.
I've been submerged three months
in rhetorical ground,
reading and writing, taking
notes from podcasters
whose shows are the recitation
of Catholic parables.
Beyond the moments of linking
lessons
and the faint salvation of my
world in the word,
I blink to notice the gaps in my
spiritual education
were never enough.
A neighbor girl tells me she's
seen
a family of deer wander our yard
beneath the Sunday sun, early.
There are houses in our roses
too:
a hummingbird seems to guard
its corner of the garden,
surviving
another night without cat or
strong wind

striking down its nest.
Home inside a home.

VIII

As I exhale
and draw near the marvels of
nature,
it tears me to see that my
soul
doesn't transition at the same
speed
as my cognition.
In this blur of color-
our hall glows cozy with the
fire lit.
Kisses on my cheek, a silver
stroke in the sky.
Tomorrow we'll bake brownies.
There's an ordinary truth
between knowing
and realizing; but today,
the unknowns of my life
are only unknowns,
and my pain is only
an accident of fate.

IX

Most likely I'll keep
reporting
a theft in progress-
of every inch of my reality
sinking
beneath the liquid stride of
time,
which at once dampens the
arrangement
of a page in an open notebook.
Psychic or cyclic,
the stages of my life keep
shifting-



"El Fénix de Phoenix" The B'K Magazine

There is no more to be said about that boy-
the one who, recalling the first symptoms of his own vanishing,
told his father, *"by then, I'll have memorized a few lines."*
As if language could be packed like bandages.
As if knowing what to say would soften the edge
of a country that never asked for his name.
A second testament waits for you,
lodged between your ribs like a song.
It's the imagined past from which
your culture unfurls-
a root system pulled from the dark
and folded neatly into a travel bag.
You carry it without complaint,
until one day, it splits open in a supermarket aisle
or during a school presentation, and you realize-
you are not the only one. So you begin again,
rehearsing a home in a house you do not own,
playing dress-up with permanence.
You learn the secret: ownership is the art of exhaustion,
of mapping meaning onto the landscape of someone else's country.
Like a phoenix who's forgotten how to fly,
you sweep the ashes into a readable shape,
flip through your history like a candlelit book,
each page a soft ember, each word risking combustion.
Have you charted your parkour route through Phoenix yet?
Every twist trained you to finally slow down.
There is no more to be said about that boy-
the one who conjugated his way
into a second language, whose body still misplaces
its own compass sometimes. He wears black now,
attending another funeral for the version of himself
he offered to assimilation. But maybe the phoenix remembers.
Maybe gravity is gentler now.

"San Carlos: Una Elegía Solar / A Hymn of Ripple Sound" University of Houston

Late at night: to bed! Something sweet will come to shake us awake in the morning.

April almost dawns, spring's resurrection as a possible beginning. We share a bed, six-year-olds whispering nighty night in my ear. Their high voices, like seagulls floating over the coast, wake me with a note stuck to the nightstand: Let's get burgers!

And their bodies fill with such sincere emotion it hurts to watch. The day is hot.

Heat drags itself along as if it were memory while we walk in flip-flops toward the lobby. We've begun to live in real time.

El Jax, in the rearview: little motels besieged by double trucks, exhausted drivers who know every curve of the México-Nogales highway. Gravel lifts dust and splits the dense air with a thin light. The seafood restaurants are crowded with tourists. Everything breathes. Everything vibrates. Could it be a mirage? Outside, in a restaurant with swings, the three of us sit down. The walls are covered with local art, with Yaqui pilgrimages. Even Paradise has history. Memory: served buffet-style. The bar: long. Feverish flavors, and cheeseburgers under the sun, no breeze. The past still inhabits this railroad town. And we dance, as if we knew how. Sacred music belongs to a place and to a time. Empalme, Guaymas, San Carlos—the soul's maps where a railway still trembles on the museum walls. Volcanic geography and the turquoise blue of the Gulf rise as a crescendo of origin. Fishing tournaments, international sailboats. Everything with an air of resurrection: Mexican summer as ritual. A dance revived, like a cultural flower opening. Human art as gift-exchange, an intercambio of stories, of hand-stitched crafts pulsing with daily life.

What we gained was economy, but what we always had was a small hypnotic song. I have seen deserts sprout in silence. A house of sand. I will stay here, staring at this wet mass, until a little castle rises.

And when it does, I'll ask it questions.
I walk the beach, mind pure, surprised by all the footprints. The ebbing waves kiss my feet. Not a mystical vision, only the filter of my dark glasses.

The god who created the universe shines in every particle. The sand sings. A single grain knows the score of your life without ever speaking it. Deep below, the earth's pressure squeezes out water, turns grain into quartz, quartz into magma, magma into hills, hills into continent—everything becomes sand again. My children ask about the castle. Buckets and shovels, mute witnesses of their passage. The water took it, I say. My voice fades with the wind: Golden hour. The sun as a round wound. A snake tells a mouse: If you travel without stopping, the voices of God and the Devil will sound the same to you. Here, in San Carlos,

we are still desert. My hand searches for the edge of the mattress, the invisible abyss.

Bonifacio's reopens, February twenty-four, after the pandemic. Tourism returns.

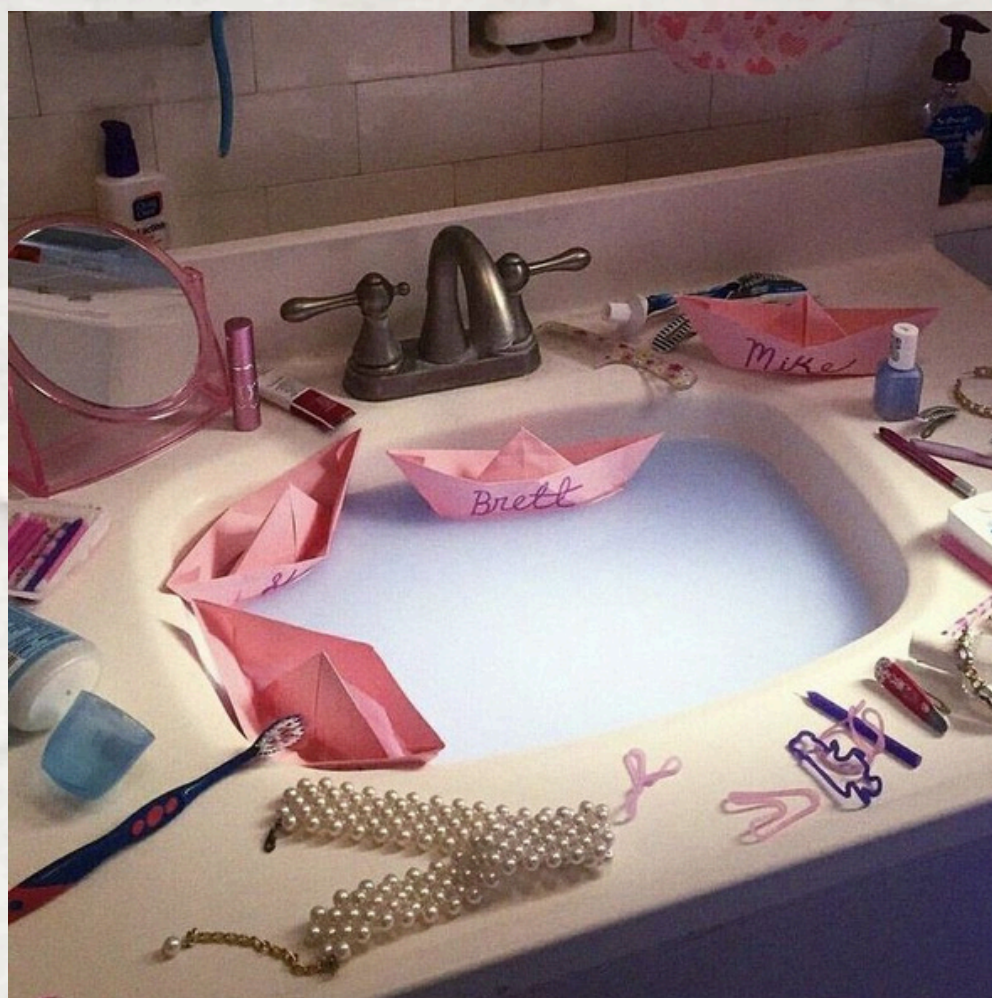
Canadians in Arizona already miss the beach. We toast the world's reopening, with flambéed bananas and red wine. The heart asks for simple gestures: a second basket of bread. A damp cloth wiping the table. I'm terrified to think this ordinary happiness might be the only thing that survives, yet something else pierces us: the possibility of restoring what we once were.

Because life, in the end, is a handful of small things that disappear without warning. The earth does its work: to reproduce, to separate us, to return us to the sea. The original recipes are now cooked by another generation. Children play at memorizing songs, clapping rhythms. Knowledge sets itself in motion. This was once a railroad city, but the trains no longer run. In Empalme, they've opened a museum. And time goes on. And I am alone with them, the ocean rushing toward our feet. We make a toast with apple juice on the shore. Soon the sunset prints a land that is no longer there, yet we remain, varnished like seashells.

There's a percussion band inside my head, the repercussions of a plan I don't yet fully understand. Everything I hear—the wind, the voice I use to give advice, the last strums on the beach—everything is recreating the sound. This clarity, this sharpened way of listening, I think it must be for something: to know where the song slows down

and needs pauses. Peace enters like a piece that fits—a piece fitting with such ease, once I dare to seize it. I think of the image of a bridge, one that connects the stimulus of instruments with the echoes of the past.

A bridge that moves us. And arches the body, the body ours, the body of all, as if carried by an invisible gust. No one knows why or when it will stop, because each new movement extends the chorus living in harmony at the center of who we are.





"Español" Meniscus Literary Journal

I

Conozco bien ese sendero, lo crucé más veces de las que ahora podría recordar. / I do remember the road. I passed it a bunch of times so now it's kinda hard to remember each of them. / En cuatro días visité un pueblo pesquero con un puñado de restaurantes cuyo menú consta de conchas recién sacadas del mar. / It took me four days to visit a coastal town with a fistful of restaurants that had a menu consisting of shells, just recently taken out of the water. / Pero también se pescan otro tipo de tesoros ahí. / Though there are some other types of treasures fished in there.

II

Un cañón subtropical parado en medio del desierto, de piedras rojas y ocre y palmeras que son hogar de miles de insectos. / A subtropical canyon standing in the middle of the desert, with red and ochre stones and palm trees that are home to thousands of insects. / Un estero mineral tan blanco que parece haber sido forrado con mármol y esculpido por un dios. / A very white mineral estuary that seems to be lined with marble and

sculpted by a god. / A veces, incluso cuando parpadeo, no lo puedo terminar de asimilar. / Sometimes, even as I blink, I can't wrap my head around its immaculate beauty.

III

Hay algunas cosas que digo, y otras que no puedo evitar escuchar. / There are some things that I say, and others that I cannot help but hearing. / Una música lírica que se intensifica al momento de darle entonación a cada una de las sílabas y las vocales. / A lyrical type of music that intensifies in the moment I attempt to give an intonation to every syllable and vowel. / El lenguaje es un canto que nace desde nuestro interior. A veces pienso que cuando hablo, en realidad estoy transmitiendo la música escrita en la partitura de mi alma. / Language is more like a chant that is born in our most inner space. Sometimes I think that whenever I speak, I'm actually transmitting the music that is written in the score of my soul. / Es muy

delicada
esa tarea de traducirse y de
aprender a escucharse. / It is
quite a delicate task to learn
how to
translate your ideas while you're
also learning how to listen to
yourself carefully.

IV

Entre dos idiomas: un puente. /
Between two languages: one
bridge. / A veces soy poesía y
otras veces mi vida se resume en
los paralelismos de las fábulas.
Uno se imaginaría que tal
vez ya que se cumplan los
treinta, tu mente te dará un
respiro, y en tu cabeza dejarás
de trasladar el lenguaje de un
lado a otro. / Sometimes I am
poetry and other times my life is
summed up in the parallels of
fables. One would imagine that
perhaps once you turn thirty,
your mind will give you a break,
and in your head, you will stop
transporting language from
one place to another. / Pero es
Sonora el lugar en el que me he
criado: sus conexiones con la
frontera al norte como un
panorama transicional, sonoro e
inevitable. Y aquí, casi de
manera
simétrica, se encuentra uno de
los muchos valores con los que te
educa el mundo. / But we're
talking about Sonora as the place

where I've been raised: its
connections with the northern
border as a sonorous and
inevitable transitional
panorama. And here, almost
symmetrically, is
one of the many values with
which the world educates us.

V

En una hora, la mayoría de los
restaurantes en San Carlos
sacarán sus mesas y un montón
de gringos veteranos irán a
ordenar sus desayunos bajo el
sol. Y yo me voy a sentar cerca
de allí.
Voy a comenzar a regalar mis
Good Morning, y a los meseros
probablemente les diga Buenos
Días. Escuchar la misma
expresión en plural solamente
me deja algunas cosas en claro:
que en español, muchos queremos
que lo bonito se nos
multiplique, y que de manera
directa, lo
manifestamos. Esperamos que la
buena fortuna nunca se acabe.
/ In about an hour, most of the
restaurants in San Carlos will
be putting their tables and
chairs out, and a group of
veteran
gringos will go ordering their
brunch under the sun. I'm gonna
start approaching them with a
Good Morning, and to the
waiters I'll probably greet

with Buenos Días, which basically means that this first expression would be said in its plural form when translated, and this only leaves a few things clear: that in Spanish, a lot of us people desire that good things multiply, and that we will try to manifest so in such a direct manner. We hope our good fortune shall never come to an end.



"The boots that shake off spirits" Plumas En Ciermes

When someone decides to become a poet, they must understand this: inspiration often rises from a father's memories—but more than anything, from his work boots.

Those boots once served as a shield, a crutch, a weapon. I remember my father, a sleepwalker, roaming the cornfields in nothing but underwear, mud caking the soles—his dreams leaving behind only the muddy prints we'd find in the foyer each morning.

In the room beside the sliding door that led to the hacienda's patio, his soles would thump together like a ritual was underway. What spirits was he guarding us from? What was he saying, unconsciously, to the land—standing watch over the harvest, even in sleep?

Behind the house, our family held the land for generations—fields of corn we'd spend months gathering. And each night, after collapsing into one of the living room chairs, my father would rise again, boots pounding the earth, as if spirits needed scaring off, as if our past had taken human form to remind us that no one is free from the sins carried in their blood.

There were nights my siblings and I timed his rounds across the fields, never finding a pattern. We always managed to catch him just after his boots had finished trampling the soil. Surely it was the ghost of a long-dead ancestor returning to ask who we were now, nearly a century after the land was first claimed. Their ghost, demanding to know whether we were worthy of the wealth their sacrifice made possible.

I like to believe there is a place where deep rest exists—where the body forgets the weight of grief and betrayal. It seems cruel now that I once thought we were to blame for the wounds carved into every inch of our skin: the swollen ankle, the ache of shoulder muscles, flesh invaded by fat. It's hard to believe some still don't know—you can let things go,

and in doing so, see life stretch far beyond the scope of sacrifice. But many spirits don't know how to carry such a belief into the world of the living. Those were my ancestors. They never got to see how I've fallen in love with the fields, with Mom's ideas for building a second floor, for adding irrigation to the land near the house. Still, I think guilt can be shared. What I haven't known yet is the day of eternal rest.

So young, I've always felt like my brain is shredded paper, my thoughts falling apart like magic. After weeks learning to ride horses, to haggle in shops, to mimic the sharp language of seasoned merchants—I cannot take credit for the victories that brought us here, on a path carved by hands of our bloodline, so many years ago. For all those misunderstandings, I decided, one day, to write a letter to the ghosts—to offer some kind of explanation.

I addressed it to one of the spirits and wrote:

***You must know this is only a hypothesis I dare to record:
It is November. Morning light spills over the back field—wet, filthy, rich. The green grass: new shoots, fresh seeds, quietly blooming into the family's gain. The soft gleam of sand scatters over Sonoran soil, twisting aimlessly in the wind. The blue firmament hovers over Ciudad Obregón. And of all the things I can say, what I know for certain is that there are two worn boots I'll remember all my life. Even if I never understood their mystery, they remain—a legacy we will always treasure.***

Writing that letter took fifteen breaths, and thirty minutes of silence. Even on Sundays, my father would wake early, dress in work clothes, and step into winter's cold embrace. His battered hands ached from the harvest, but with his gloves, he sealed and sold every single ear of corn.

What woke me was the stomp of his boots. While the others slept, I would rise in pajamas and follow him—sleepwalking through the middle of the night, haunted by the rigid stares of those same spirits, who, despite the letter, took a while to leave us in peace.

I was angry with him once. I told him I was thinking of leaving, of abandoning the land and its legacies. But what did I know? What could I possibly know about unconditional love, about the sacrifice of ending each day with two boots stained by a hundred winding paths?



"Mirror" Lucky Jefferson

Every morning for the past three years, I've woken to a woman who no longer exists. She's taped to the corner of my mirror. *Andrea*, or what remains of her. The photo is grainy, clipped from the local paper: her face half-smiling, a wisp of hair tucked behind one ear, and beneath the fold, a headline I refuse to re-read. Some mornings, I forget she's there. I wipe steam off the glass and there she is—framed between toothpaste smudges and my tired reflection. On those days, I dream for her. I offer her another sunrise. I dream her a second morning, soft and suburban, filled with birdsong and cereal bowls and children tugging at her skirt. She had two. Children. A father who led nine marches for her before the police let him identify her bones. Andrea was thirty-seven when she disappeared. Her last known location: beside her boyfriend. Her last known moment: unknowable.

The body was found by a road that links Guaymas and Empalme. The bypass, they call it. As if what happened could be bypassed. Her name used to come up in conversation, clenched between molars like a prayer or a warning. Andrea. They said it the way you say thunder—like something already past but still echoing. Why does God strip his floor if He still means to varnish it? I asked this once, aloud, after reading the autopsy report online, searching for something, anything, that would justify it. But Andrea never got to ask questions like that. She didn't know she was in the prologue of her last chapter.

She didn't get to put on her dress for the occasion. She didn't get to run, to scream, to second-guess the man beside her. She didn't get to wake up. She was a woman, then a silhouette, then a heat source—her body calcined. The papers said that. *Calcined*. Like she were a rock to be purified. And now? Her story isn't hers anymore. It lives in the hands of strangers: the girl making protest posters with glitter-glue and grief; the aunt who never met her but now won't stop crying; the fathers who show up with their daughters at rallies just to whisper, *you are not alone*.

The ashes still float through the barrio, sneak under doorways, settle in nostrils. You don't know you're breathing her in until you open your mouth to speak and rage pours out. I drive past the Municipal Palace

This morning, I brushed my teeth, looked in the mirror. She was still there, taped at the corner, watching. She looks like she's asking something of me. Like maybe I'm the one being reflected now. So I took the photo off. Not to forget her. To carry her with me. This is what grief looks like after it calcines: a mirror emptied, a road filled, a flame kept alive in the breath of a thousand strangers. And I am every minute passing after her.



