
*revuelvo y repito palabras sin sentido:
la vida enena, matriz sin tumba.
En un lugar interno algo se revienta
y un agitado viento empuja los pedazos.*

III

Crossers

y otros atravesados

*Al otro lado está el río
y no lo puedo cruzar,
al otro lado está el mar
no lo puedo atravesar.*

—Isabel Parra, "En La Frontera"

On the other side is the river
and I cannot cross it
on the other side is the sea
I cannot bridge it.

—Isabel Parra, "At The Border"

Poets have strange eating habits
(for Irenita Klepfisz)

Dark windowless no moon glides
across the night sky
I coax and whip the balking mare
to the edge
peel the scabs from her wounds
Her body caves into itself
through the hole
my mouth

In the border between dusk and dawn
I listen to frozen thumpings, my soul
Should I jump face tumbling
down the steps of the temple
heart offered up to the midnightsun

She takes that plunge
off the high cliff
hooves tumbling in the vagrant air
head tucked between her legs
a cold wind tugging at her back
cutting tears from my eyes
the obsidian knife, air
the night sky alone alone

She spreads out her legs
to catch the wind
rushes to fill *el abismo*
the night ride has ripped open
its hunger rimmed with teeth
I feed it my throat my hands
let it glut itself on me
till it's pregnant with me.
Wounding is a deeper healing.

Suspended in fluid sky
I, eagle fetus, live serpent
feathers growing out of my skin

the buffeting wind
the rock walls rearing up
the Earth.

I bend my knees, break the fall
no arm snapping
a stunned animal
I burrow deep into myself
pull the emptiness in
its hollows chisel my face
growing thin thinner
eyesockets empty
tunneling here tunneling there
the slither of snakes
their fangs pierce my flesh

falling

into faceless air
Taking the plunge an act as
routine as cleaning my teeth.

The Earth parts
I hit the bottom of the chasm
peer over the edge
coax and whip the balking mare
take that plunge again
jumping off cliffs an addiction
flailing pummeling
flesh into images
sticking feathers
in my arms
slithering into holes
with rattlesnakes

dark windowless no moon glides
across the night sky
the maw opens wide I slip inside
Taking deep breaths eyes closed
*me la tragó todita**

**me la tragó todita*—I swallow it whole

Yo no fui, fue Teté
(para Mando Gaitán y Ronnie Burks)

*a lo macho, simón que sí
estaba anocheciendo
salí a la calle del dormido pueblo a putear
y allí me estaban esperando
los chingones, batos grifos.
orale, ¿pos qué train conmigo?
¿qué pedo es éste?*

*me llevaron al yonke.
zs, me dieron mis crismas
jijo 'ela chingada we struggled man, piel a piel
me escupieron en la cara
"lambiscón, culero, pinche puto"
me arrinconaron, me dieron una paliza
me partieron la madre
conocí la cara del odio, del miedo
sentí la navaja
esas miradas enloquecidas
y tienen los huevos de llamarnos "locas"
que verguenza, mi misma raza
jijo 'ela chingada
me ensucí en los pantalones
allí en el pavimento
allí me quedé jodido
aullando por la noche como huérfano
allí me dejaron
de volada me pelé pa' la casa*

The Cannibal's Canción

It is our custom
to consume
the person we love.
Taboo flesh: swollen
genitalia nipples
the scrotum the vulva
the soles of the feet
the palms of the hand
heart and liver taste best.
Cannibalism is blessed.

I'll wear your jawbone
round my neck
listen to your vertebrae
bone rapping bone in my wrists.
I'll string your fingers round my waist—
what a rigorous embrace.
Over my heart I'll wear
a brooch with a lock of your hair.
Nights I'll sleep cradling
your skull sharpening
my teeth on your toothless grin.

Sundays there's Mass and communion
and I'll put your relics to rest.

En mi corazón se incubaba
(para Sonia Alvarez)

*Todo comienza a partir de este día,
Una tristeza me invade y
Algo extraño se oculta en mi vientre—
Un golpe de soledad que me consume.
En mi corazón se incubaba una espina.*

*La luz de las luciérnagas se retira y
De los árboles me llaman las lechuzas.
Inmersa en un abandono, tragando miedos,
Me siento muy lejos
De la huella del amor.*

*En tumbas huérfanas gasto largas noches,
Los minutos pasan como agujas por mi piel.
Soy una sombra pálida en una noche opaca.
Hondo escondo mi pena, hondo.
Hondo se enraíza un sueño noconfesado.*

*En este oscuro monte de nopal
Algo secretamente amado
Se oculta en mi vientre
Y en mi corazón se incubaba
Un amor que no es de este mundo.*

Corner of 50th St. and Fifth Av.

Taking my usual walk
I run into sirens flashing red, turning
and a small crowd
watching the dark-haired man
with the thin mustache,
PR about 30,
maricón, a voice in the crowd shouts.

Two uniforms have his head
wedged down in the gap
between the bucket seats,
red sirens turning turning
just over his head.

Another pulls down his pants
holds him tight around the waist
the fourth pummels
the pale orbs over and over
till the PR's face is flushed
the cop's fist red
the sirens turning turning.
The first two look bored
eyes drifting slowly
over the crowd
not meeting our eyes.
He just thud got out thud of jail
I hear a Rican say
thud, the cop's arms like baseball bats.
Finally the thuds end.
They pull his head
out of the crack,
pull pants over livid cheeks,
manacled hands going down
to cover his buttocks

the sirens turning turning
I wade through the thick air thinking
that's as close as they let themselves get
to fucking a man, being men.

Compañera, cuando amábamos
(for Juanita Ramos and other spik dykes)

*¿Volverán, compañera, esas tardes sordas
Cuando nos amábamos tiradas en las sombras bajo otoño?
Mis ojos clavados en tu mirada
Tu mirada que siempre retiraba al mundo
Esas tardes cuando nos acostábamos en las nubes*

*Mano en mano nos paseábamos por las calles
Entre niños jugando handball
Vendedores y sus sabores de carne chamuzcada.
La gente mirando nuestras manos
Nos pescaban los ojos y se sonreían
Cómplices en esto asunto del aire suave.
En un café u otro nos sentábamos bien cerquita.
Nos gustaba todo: las bodegas tiznadas
La música de Silvio, el ruido de los trenes
Y habichuelas. Compañera,
¿Volverán esas tardes sordas cuando nos amábamos?*

*¿Te acuerdas cuando te decía ¡tócame!?
¿Cuándo ilesa carne buscaba carne y dientes labios
En los laberintos de tus bocas?
Esas tardes, islas no descubiertas
Cuando caminábamos hasta la orilla.
Mis dedos lentos andaban las lomas de tus pechos,
Recorriendo la llanura de tu espalda
Tus moras hinchándose en mi boca
La cueva mojada y racima.
Tu corazón en mi lengua hasta en mis sueños.
Dos pescadoras nadando en los mares
Buscando esa perla.
¿No te acuerdas como nos amábamos, compañera?*

*¿Volverán esas tardes cuando vacilábamos
Pasos largos, manos entrelazadas en la playa?
Las gaviotas y las brizas
Dos manfloras vagas en una isla de mutua melodía.
Tus tiernas palmas y los planetas que se caían.*

*Esas tardes tiñadas de mojo
Cuando nos entregábamos a las olas*

*Cuando nos tirábamos
En el zacate del parque
Dos cuerpos de mujer bajo los árboles
Mirando los barcos cruzando el río
Tus pestañas barriendo mi cara
Dormitando, oliendo tu piel de amapola.
Dos extranjeras al borde del abismo
Yo caía descabellada encima de tu cuerpo
Sobre las lunas llenas de tus pechos
Esas tardes cuando se mecía el mundo con mi resuello
Dos mujeres que hacían una sola sombra bailarina
Esas tardes andábamos hasta que las lámparas
Se prendían en las avenidas.*

*¿Volverán,
Compañera, esas tardes cuando nos amábamos?*

Interface
(for Frances Doughty)

She'd always been there
 occupying the same room.
 It was only when I looked
 at the edges of things
 my eyes going wide watering,
 objects blurring.
 Where before there'd only been empty space
 I sensed layers and layers,
 felt the air in the room thicken.
 Behind my eyelids a white flash
 a thin noise.
 That's when I could see her.

 Once I accidentally ran my arm
 through her body
 felt heat on one side of my face.
 She wasn't solid.
 The shock pushed me against the wall.
 A torrent of days swept past me
 before I tried to "see" her again.
 She had never wanted to be flesh she told me
 until she met me.
 At first it was hard to stay
 on the border between
 the physical world
 and hers.
 It was only there at the interface
 that we could see each other.
 See? We wanted to touch.
 I wished I could become
 pulsing color, pure sound, bodiless as she.
 It was impossible, she said
 for humans to become noumenal.

What does it feel like, she asked
 to inhabit flesh,
 wear blood like threads

 constantly running?
 I would lie on the bed talking
 she would hover over me.
 Did I say talk?
 We did not use words.
 I pushed my thoughts toward her.
 Her "voice" was a breath of air
 stirring my hair
 filling my head.
 Once Lupe my roommate
 walked right through her
 dangling the car keys.
 I felt Leyla shiver.
 I named her Leyla,
 a pure sound.

I don't know when I noticed
 that she'd begun to glow,
 to look more substantial
 than the blurred furniture.
 It was then I felt a slight touch,
 her hand—a tendril of fog—
 on the sheets where she'd lain
 a slight crease, a dampness,
 a smell between candles and skin.
 You're changing, I told her.
 A yearning deluged me—
 her yearning.
 That's when I knew
 she wanted to be flesh.
 She stayed insubstantial day after day
 so I tried to blur
 my borders, to float, become pure sound.
 But my body seemed heavier,
 more inert.

I remember when she changed.
 I could hear the far away slough of traffic
 on the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway,
 the people downstairs were playing salsa.

We lay enclosed by margins, hems,
where only we existed.

She was stroking stroking my arms
my legs, marveling at their solidity,
the warmth of my flesh, its smell.

Then I touched her.

Fog, she felt like dense fog,
the color of smoke.

She glowed, my hands paled then gleamed
as I moved them over her.

Smoke-fog pressing against my eyelids
my mouth, ears, nostrils, navel.

A cool tendril pressing between my legs
entering.

Her finger, I thought
but it went on and on.

At the same time
an iciness touched my anus,
and she was in
and in and in

my mouth opening
I wasn't scared just astonished
rain drummed against my spine
turned to steam as it rushed through my veins
light flickered over me from toe to crown.

Looking down my body I saw
her forearm, elbow and hand
sticking out of my stomach
saw her hand slide in.

I wanted no food no water nothing
just her—pure light sound inside me.

My roommate thought I was
having an affair.

I was "radiant," she said.

Leyla had begun to swell
I started hurting a little.

When I started cramping
she pushed out
her fingers, forearm, shoulder.
Then she stood before me,

fragile skin, sinews tender as baby birds
and as transparent.

She who had never eaten
began to hunger.

I held a cup of milk to her mouth,
put her hand on my throat
made swallowing motions.

I spooned mashed banana into her bird mouth,
hid the baby food under the bed.

One day my roommate asked
who was staying in my room,
she'd heard movements.

A friend recovering from a contagious
skin disease, I said.

She ran out saying, I'm going to the Cape
indefinitely. See you.

We had the house to ourselves.
I taught her how to clean herself,
to flush.

She would stand before the mirror
watching her ears, long and diaphanous,
begin to get smaller, thicker.

She spent a lot of time at the window.
Once I caught her imitating
the shuffle of the baglady.

No, like this, I told her.
Head up, shoulders back.

I brought in the TV.
This is how humans love, hate, I said.

Once we sat on the stoop
watching a neighbor sweep the sidewalk.

Hello, he yelled, hello, I yelled back,
eh-oh, she whispered.

Watch my lips, Ley-la.
Say it, Ley-la.

Good. I love you.
Ah uff oo, she said.

Soon Leyla could pass,
go for milk at the bodega, count change.

But no matter how passionately we made

love
 it was never like before
 she'd taken on skin and bone.

Do you ever want to go back, I asked her.
 No, it's slower here and I like that.
 I hate summers in NYC, I told her,
 wish it was winter already.
 The temperature dropped 10 degrees 20
 and when a chill wind began to blow in Brooklyn
 I told her to stop
 messing with the cycles that affected others.
 I watched what I said
 and let Leyla run the place.
 She had snow in the livingroom
 and a tree in the bathtub.
 Nights I lit the illegal fireplace.
 Once when reaching toward a high shelf,
 I wished I was taller.
 When my head touched the ceiling
 I had to yell at her to stop,
 reverse.

How do you do it, I asked her.
 You do it, too, she said,
 my species just does it faster,
 instantly, merely by thinking it.

The first time she rode the subway
 I had to drag her out.
 I suppose it was the noise,
 the colors flashing by, the odd people
 that held her open-mouthed gaze.
 I had to do a gig in L.A.,
 speak at a conference, was short on cash,
 but she wanted to come.
 She walked past the flight attendants
 didn't even have to hide in the lavatory.
 She laughed at my amazement, said
 humans only saw what they were told to see.
 Last Christmas I took her home to Texas.
 Mom liked her.
 Is she a lez, my brothers asked.
 I said, No, just an alien.
 Leyla laughed.

IV

Cihuahlyotl, Woman Alone

*Yo llamo a mujer,
 canto por mujer.
 Cubierta con serpientes vengo yo,
 al lugar del encuentro me acerco,
 repito conjuros para provocar amor.
 Clamo por mujer.
 Ya llego, llamo.*

—Gloria Anzaldúa