Hija, Free of Flight

by

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And finally To Mami: who took flight, so we could survive.
Table of Contents

Transcript of Recording 1

I.
Borikén 3
Viento En Popa 4
The Mango Tree 6
Southern Charm 7
Pages 9
Papi’s Syrup 10
Mami Saved The Toothpaste 11
Our Lady of Regla 12
Estroberi Shoes 13

II.
My Name 15
Papelitos Guardados 16
Epitaph For Spanglish 20
Of The Splendor In Between 21
One Night Stand 22
Philly Cat Calls 23

The Woman Who Lives in Jamaica Plains 25
Jefferson Station Hustle 26
Body Read 27
Anaísa 28
Origins of the Word Cunt 30
The Yard 31
Adante 32

III.
Basura Birth 33
Few Basic Steps of Salsa 35
FoxTrot 36
Finding Sappho 37
The Little Girl in La Villita 38
The Photographer, Fading 39
Same Dream Since 11 Years Old 41
Impact Play 42
Transcript of Voice Recording, Mami and Son. 2002.

Mami: but I don’t remember a lot of things but that’s fine...but yeah, you do your project and I do my project of putting things together and we will do things together, that will be our project together...we can go over a lot of things.

Edrik: sí, pero, how did you meet dad...did you always know him?...did you live close?

Mami: no it was...ay, I don’t like to remember that...Madeline..mi hermana...Madeline was friends. I was in catholic school...so I did not hang out with them...but she went to public school...y allí fue que conoci a Lourdes tu tía...Madeline se hizo amiga de Lourdes..y nos asimos amigas de ellos...y despues, yo me hice amigas de todos ellos, siempre estabamos en la casa de Doña Ana y Abuelo Jaime...siempre abian a bunch of tinegers on the streets en la verja..I guess that was the way..

Edrik: ah

Mami: yeah but I was a very immature...I didn’t know anything about relationships..they didn’t like me to have boyfriends, ¡que boyfriends!, friends male friends, at all... I use to like another boy antes de tu padre...they make fun of him because he still not marry and they say oh he still waiting for you

Edrik: va ser cosas si que te quiero preguntar, and some of it might be difficult to answer or remember

Mami: yeah I remember..

Edrik: but if you don’t remember or want to that’s okay

Mami: I got pictures, too.

Edrik: ¿Sí?

Mami: but it was a very bad things..but I don’t like to tell Nicole about it...it was a dark side of my part...she ask me, oh why you marry...why you marry dad...but I don’t go into details...but it was a very bad time..mis papas they hate him...he was like he was like in the bad crowds

Edrik: who papi?

Mami: en la plazita con los mariguamneros, you know that kind of boy...yeah, now I know how...how I want my daughter to be con ese tipo de muchacho!

Edrik: bueno pero
Mami: en la plazita con los mariguianeros, you know that kind of boy...yeha, now I know how... how I want my daughter to be con ese tipo de muchacho!

Edrik: bueno pero

Mami: maybe you gonna be the first person who gonna know the truth, but Nicole ashe asked me...oh, how you met dad...but I don’t go into the details

Edrik: si quieres

Mami: but you’re an adult so I’m...I can tell you now...maybe

Edrik: pero tambien I’m curious because of different perspectives, curious of different events that occurred, you know I remember how I remember but I want to know how Yussel or Nicole remembers them...how much she remembers from Colfax..

Mami: Colfax

Edrik: Sí Colfax y tambien 15th street..anyway..ok mami se que tienes que ir, pero gracias y hablamos más...pues bendición

Mami: okay papi, dios te bendiga, cualquier cosa pues me llamas mas tarde.

end of recording.
Borikén

Islands are pronounced
by the ocean without bubbles
Sometimes the ocean chokes on an island
as it tries to take it back, these are left alone

to defy the heat and birds and when bubbles
appear around them they harden into reefs.
Such islands, the ocean can no longer
pronounce their names push back
the language of the water: a beach

A woman stepping out of the ocean
wearing every starfish at once like armor.
She crystallized her eyes with the liquor of
the seed planted in her mouth. She cut her
destiny in two and kept the heavier one.
Viento En Popa

Rina runs away,
she flies away,
she is not immigrant
she is not migrant
she is refugee

she flew bruised
she shielded us from
Puerto Rico

she is not afraid,
Edwin is afraid
she is brave
she refuses her husband
she refuses her rapist

she is afraid
she has three kids
no money, only enough
for the flight,

the flight away is brave
the flight away is not betrayal

she is mother
she is sound
she is rhythm of the lost language
she is from Algiers

she is a woman whose family
disowns her, a woman who
arrives in isolation,
she is not on welfare,
the system is on welfare

she is the constant
movement of peoples
she is the witch
that can control Ariel
she is with children,
she flies
she flies,
she is banished
from there
and here,

she is afraid
she is courageous
she is not a parasite
on the system
she is the ocean itself
splashing on the shores
of this country

she is life
she is blood
she is not a metaphor
she is Sycorax
The Mango Tree

The children play a game with me every afternoon, two little boys anxiously wait at the entrance of the balcón, when they hear the thud of my fruit hitting the floor they sprint towards me, the wind plays along, blowing between my leaves saying, corre, corre, their mother in the background always claiming, if it is red, more than yellow or green.

When they sleep the mother is awake staring at the moonlight, like she’s not there listening; like she’s catching up to the present. I hug her with my branches, she whispers into the petals the dreams she can longer dream. She hides her worries in the veins of my leaves: will he return? El Gato, El Gato, jumps onto the base of my trunk, the weight of what is to come carves into my bark. He climbs, stumbles through the bedroom window —she screams policia, policia, and my twigs snap in half, she screams, the first call of flight.

The children no longer play with my fruit, the mangos lay at my feet like unhatched eggs, the mother no longer stares at the moon and in fits of rage, she tears apart my leaves, even those make her claustrophobic. She collapses to the ground she is pregnant with grief, her tears water my feet.

The children no longer play with my fruit, the mother no longer stares at the moon, and soon after they are gone. What became of her cries, and does she still dream?
Southern Charm

It was the times of confederate flags and Budweiser camo gear, green John Deere hats, and Nascar t-shirts adorned on pot bellies, cigarettes flickering from white folks' lips who asked questions like:

"Where in Mexico is Puerto Rico?, cus you shure don't look like them other hezzpanicks". My white skin to them, _blanquita, gringuita, ven acá_ my grandmother would tease, was a hall pass to insult brown people everywhere,

when classmates would complain about too many Mexicans taking our jobs and abusing our god given American welfare. Too many childhood days spent standing in the middle of an aftermath of a tornado bedroom,

books, Barbie dolls, hair brushes, broken toys on the floor, dry wall peeling away from humid summer days, just windows opened with screens blackened by bugs trying to come in, confronted with chaos, they too would try and escape. I just wanted to escape. Escape, the laughter I would hear coming from my neighbor's pool and the reality that when we arrived we had nothing. My brothers learned to run to the side of the house and locate the switch to rig the water company so we could take a shower before school. I wanted to escape learning rituals of leaving the lights on through the night in the kitchen, keeping the cabinets open so that in case I was thirsty and needed a drink, I could feel a little less queasy about what sorts of feet may have been crawling on the rims of those cups. I wanted to escape the guilt nurtured in Pentecostal church pews. Escape the story that I was of the generations of po'ricans who grew up too far from mountainsides, jibaro straw hats, and the music of coquis.

I was of the generation of those who missed the great exodus to New York, Chicago and Philadelphia.

I was of the generation of po'ricans who belonged to neither here nor there, _ni de aquí o allá_, who daydreamed in the pauses of guiros and guitar breaks heard through the cackling of headphones:
preciosa te llevo dentro, muy dentro de mi corazón
trying to conjure the feeling of being proud when I
was constantly told that my pride isn’t unfounded
it just doesn’t exist here. The closest to salsa bands

I danced to was at the daily visits to Value Pawn where
Mami had to make her payments to retrieve broken
stereos Papi stole in order to get his next fix from
Ridgewood avenue, he was too weak to refuse.

The instruments hang with price tags dangling
like the city morgue ticket on a dead man’s toe.
There was no borikén alive here.
What was to become of us?
My mother laughs in both English and Spanish,  
she doesn’t feel pain all the time. Sometimes,  
I think she does because I want to rescue her,  
maybe this is the mission I imagine for myself.  
A time traveling of sorts, where I return to scenes  
of angst and despair, come up with the answers  
I should have, if I could have said then.  
One Christmas, when Papi was living  
with another woman while still  
made to my mother he brought this bag  
full of presents with that woman,  
hers daughter holding my Papi’s hand.  
No one woke up early that Christmas,  
and when he showed up we were all happy  
opening up our gifts while my mother  
slept—or rather stayed in bed—and after they  
left I went to her room to show her one of the gifts,  
a word processor to type away, and all she did was say  
“T’m sorry for this Christmas I didn’t have a lot of money”  
but she handed me a small gift anyway,  
wrapped in birthday wrapping,  
I opened it, it was a book.
Papi's Syrup

His syringe. His sin. A sweet serum.
Sizzling. Filling in the nut of his skull.
Small mental biting. Drawing blood
from a backyard thought. Turning.
Spinning silly. Spitting. Stuck in the warp.
Black needle stuck in the groove. Black record.
Sipping the strange sin. The darkness's incipient.
Slipping into a spin. Sifting in the silt.
Pinching off weak nerve. Unnerved.
He is morning. Mourning. Darkened. Dulled.
Indulging in dope. Dancing in his half-death longing.
Purple'd in his own wicked lust for the sugar.
So, it cooks him.
Mami Saved The Toothpaste

The art of glorious invention and glorious survival
are the moments of growing up poor in a house
where the cockroaches are up all night racing
across your spoons, but mirrors and revolutions
dance across dishware that never matched and live
in the holes of wallpaper that never matched.

There’s beauty in the ugly of this house
that lives in your throat, content and on fire
because it is home, the place your poems return to.
They’re the moments of growing up poor and despite
Mami’s timidity in front of officials of state
at the welfare-food-stamp agency, she manages
to bloom the sentence of a language she doesn’t
understand, adjusting the roses on her tongue.

In the hungriest moments she provides a feast with
simple ingredients of white rice, fried eggs and ketchup on top.
They’re the moments of growing up poor and Mami spoke
in Spanish, we answered in English but Spanglish came
to the rescue, as Laviera spoke: continentally abrazándonos
en colloquial combate, immigrant/migrant, we possess ritmos
y sueños que no se pueden sacar from our essences.
They’re the moments of growing up poor,
the moments when you run out of toothpaste

and Mami tells you to cut it open con tijeras,
in the middle, halves opening up, scrape the sides

with the toothbrush. There will always be more
than what you can see.
Our Lady of Regla

When I was six months pregnant with you, I visited Luquillo and dipped into the water, Yemayá shared her secret song of her womb, so that one day you might wail with, wail for, other wooden rib cages that held our moans like a fist.

I worry about you every day, pray for your travel on the metal casket that propels you home. It is no sacred place, no spirits are called forward and still your body sways and it has nothing to do with the way the train moves.

I can’t protect you from the man who disrobes you on the train, touches you, then asks for money. The only thing I have to offer is this cry, swollen in my throat; I have been saving it for you.
Estroberi Shoes

para Abuelo Jaime

Abuelo,
I learned about your death over the Internet,
in a picture posted by a distant cousin,
but I lost you long before. I'm writing in a language
you wouldn't understand. Like when I was 16,
and I returned to the island donde he nacido yo
a granddaughter from the tribe of esos no son de aqui
I was unrecognizable to you.
The aged outlines of your wandering face
are brushes of empty air, you had no
memory of me.

You had long forgotten what I remembered:
summers worked in shoe factories, tough
and tender hands, always bringing home the gift
of a new pair. Zapatos de chicle you'd call them,
the soles of the pink ones smelled just like el estroberi
you'd say. As you gently placed them
on my tiny feet, you would also tell me stories--
epochs of nuestra tiny island that connected us
at our hearts. Inside is where we met. Your voice,
a hammock, swinging the generations that came before.
I'd wear these shoes proudly, standing on the love
of mi abuelito, while all the kids would crowd
during show and tell, wanting to get a sniff of these
strange items, from a faraway land, I journeyed to
as if I and only I traveled to the places named
in our story time circle fairytale books.

Abuelo,
I also know you could not refuse the bottle,
maybe that's how your son inherited the skill,
of driving me to little league games with a beer
in a brown paper bag between his legs. He tried
to hold my hand tight, bad breath, and body odor
vaporizing the small space of the car. His greasy hair,
his faded tattoos on loveless war torn skin,
tattoos of names of women he used to love,
Beverly, Barbara, and Rina, my mother,
the original tattoo, the same woman who
screamed when she found out about these drives
as if her voice was all that could save me from
being hurt by him. The days after, your son,
my father, felt so guilty, he’d tell me
stories as a means of apology.

Abuelo,
every day I’m trying not to drink so instead
I pray.
There’s still so much more to say,
so much more to know, so much more to become
because I write this poem in a language you don’t
understand. The pain, it knows the place we are,
but not who is speaking.
Your death means I can’t turn back to tradition,
there’s no guide map of the future,
how will I understand your son?
How will I understand myself,
and the memories of my hands
dragging along side bushes
in the front of your house,
where a thousand white moths would
burst from the leaves, an explosion
of confetti released, finally free.
My Name

I’ve always wondered
where my name came from.
I was born in Puerto Rico
twenty seven years ago,
two months before
my first birthday
we moved hurried
to the United States.
Florida, specifically.

I remember
being in a car (in PR)
when my aunt and uncle
asked me indignantly
about my name.
They said that my name
should have been Nicolasa
The Spanish version.

"Por que tu mamá
give you an American name?"

Today, like a truth that
connects all of one’s
life and history,
I realized why.

At least, one of her children
would not grow up in the
conditions that she did.

We would be moving way
when I was born.

And to keep a promise
to herself;
she called her daughter
Nicole.
Papelitos Guardados

11 years old.
The night after it happened.
My father crying and bleeding in the middle
of the living room floor
spilling his sadness on the carpet like ink.

The first time.
In Ms. Skimmers science class, I read that rabbits
have to constantly chew to file down their teeth
or else sharp enamel will erupt from their lips,
splitting the flesh beyond repair.

Overcome with
my own need to chew, I stab my most sacred sharp
thing between my fingers and turn out the lights.

September.
I learn that terrorists have taken over a plane
with nothing more than boxcutters, sending
hundreds of passengers hurling to their death.
I look at my left forearm, wracked with guilt.

15th Street.
You always knew to get her when my
brothers were away either at baseball
and football games..
What amount of fear is the right amount of fear?
You enter the bedroom, lock the door behind you,
what followed--
her wailing, a muffled cry, and the crashing
of furniture collapsing worlds unto itself.

15th street.
After, I could smell the budweiser trail
of your breathe, the yellow fog of your
eyes, your failed attempts of stroking
my hair for comfort whispering
“shh but you know i love her, right?”

Bryn Mawr.
Dripping wet scarlet, staining the tile
on the floor of the communal dorm shower.
A paper sign hung above the mirror reads
*You are an adult. The housekeeping staff is not your mother. Please clean up after yourself.*

*Poetry Workshop.*
Years later, I attempt to *write about the stain that will never come out* and the memory visits me nightly with La Llorona.

*Breakdown.*
In the campus health center, I am a paper tab printed with a number. An unwanted customer in a hostile butchery.

A voice calls me to the counter but does not bother taking my name. I'm told there is nothing wrong with me except disgrace. A nurse hands me a pamphlet titled *God's Answers To Our Deep Hurts,* says she'll leave me alone to pray.

*Pillows.*
Are the easiest places to hide
dinner steak knives late night.

*Breakdown II.*
Half-past midnight, the stroke of cliché. I'm standing next to the railroad tracks that divide the campus, shadowed on the south end. A long freight train passes like a slow moan, like La Llorona howling.

I want to jump. To be swept to my reward by coal dust.
Instead of dying, I open my throat, screaming against the roar.

The doctor in the sweater vest does not look up from his notepad once during our session.

I tell him everything I can remember. He hands me a prescription, says *take one of these twice a day for the next six months.* He does not look me in the eye. He does not speak my name.

*Girlfriends.*
I've failed all of them.
The psychologist.
She has seen
every terrible thing humanity has to offer,
and reminds me of this
with every session.
She says I just need to have some perspective.
Says just keep taking your meds as prescribed, things will look up.
She does not look me in the eye. She does not speak my name.

February.
Breakdown. Again. The doctor who won't look me in the eye
stands me in line for medication with everyone else on the ward.

He tells me I'm increasing your dosage
& February is a fog I can only sleep through.

Florida.
My mother bleaches the tub con Mistolin.
Buys new bath towels, dark enough
not to stain. She tells me que she will
always love me no matter what.

I want to tell her I'm sorry,
but all I can whisper is
Lo sé mami.

Naté. Wearing a t-shirt with Biggie's face under a short sleeved jean button up.
Tells me all of my training expects me
to put people into nice, neat little categories. But folks aren't neat.
They're messy and disorganized, ain't nobody fit in a textbook-shaped box.

I see her again. She tells me never forget,
you're more than your history, more than what these places tell you.
She doesn't ask me any probing questions or offer any cliches

says wherever you go with your writing, whenever you make it big,
remember who got you there. And maybe remember me as well.
It takes me years to realize she offered these as separate things.

Graduation.

I see Naté for the last time. She wishes me well,
tells me you're gonna be just fine girl, and one day
you can use this experience to relate to someone
who needs to know they ain't alone.

She gives me a hug, looks me in the eye,
says her goodbyes addressing me by name.
Epitaph for Spanglish

The tongue is shattered, hungered
to recite a poem in Spanish, a language
both lost and found, inside of its speaker
like nostalgia pre experienced, it hungered
to speak from the part of love that is tragic
life frightening, speaking with a shame
it knows not of what it is guilty of, to speak
English from the hollow wells of survival
Of The Splendor In-Between

Fevered looking on,
naked in Casa Larga,
you a bright lipped jewel
gripping the rigid pedicle
of a Bordeaux.

Self set aside,
deciphering libation from allurement,
you finally allow desire, holy ancient
primordial urge, allow the fantastic unfastening.

The blade of your back meets the tongue
of chords; mental melting. rapid rolling,
gyrating a purr in the mouth of your pussy,
that libidinous dimple sleeping sweetly between your thighs.

Sing yourself the moans, the chance to illustrate
yourself inside the pain of having lovers lost.
Come, arrive, unworried.
One Night Stand

Quick judgment means getting
lost in a jumble of tangled lines
amidst knees knocking,
and sweat that burns like a blown match.
Tongues cooking in their mouths sing magic
in their need to suck fingers
dipped inside you searching for
that honey that I wanted.
Drink me up you say, I’m the healing.
Philly Cat Calls

Saturday morning and the corner boys
have their feet permanently etched on
the curb, saying we are here,
although I wasn’t paying them any mind,
I was too preoccupied with discovering
another method to help me walk correctly,
I’m a bird tired of flight, my wings are bent,
my feet turn inward, walking wounded as I try to
eliminate the hip hop in my step, untuck my hands
in my pockets while straightening the shoulders
hunched forward, raise the brim of my fitted
hat so they can see I still have my mother’s eyelashes.
I’ve seen these guys too many times
displaced in their own block, now stands
a high end café selling lattes at $4 a cup
too much, because gentrification made
their home unrecognizable and luxury condos,
which they could never afford, are now
the backdrop of their memories.
I think I understand why they were angry,
I was angry at myself too, for spending
too much money on an overpriced cup of coffee,
disappointing my grandmother’s spirit who
taught me you could make cafe colao
with a sock, saucepan, milk and sugar.
Maybe they were angry because I didn’t offer
any change when they opened up the door,
or maybe they were angry because I looked
them straight in the eye and signaled with my chin:
what’s good, I see you, I’m here too
or maybe it was how my button up shirt
cradled my breast just the right amount
of outline to reveal I still was less than
the walk I tried to man up in my stride.
And so came the animal call whistle and:
You look real gay ma, whatchu happy for?
you ain’t a man, just a thecniggabitch
as I quickened my step–
thick nigga bitch.
as I cradled the pain in the inner seam
of my chest–

AYYY THICK NIGGA BITCH
Do I remain silent when Audre’s
voice is loud in my mind:
When we speak we are afraid our words
will not be heard or welcomed.
But when we are silent, we are still afraid.
So it is better to speak.
So I respond: not gay as in happy but queer as in
fuck you, motherfucker.
Knowing all I could do to get through
this moment, trying to walk the streets
to touchable.
The Woman who lives in Jamaica Plains

Your hands are what I remember most.
You have a woman’s hands, I said.

What I meant to say was that your hands
are strong, deep aged lines trace your story
cupped by the sweetness of lilac,
in them a warm protection, hands

performing daily rituals, lotions blanketing
trails of legs and crevices, toes, baby oils

against toffee complexion. Moments- which you
finally settle back in your own skin, hesitant, meet my eyes

with the most tentative of smiles a glance, the barest sweep of lash,
eyebrow arched, declaring your challenge.

I say, how could I ever hurt you?
You tell me, I only cared about the moment after,

skipping in rivulets of contented desire,
drinking up the vulnerability,
undressing yourself for my softness,

the moments of slowing still ragged breaths
of pride and humility at once, trying to hold yourself
together, sewing yourself shut
Closing the wound tightly.
Jefferson Station Hustle

Philadelphia

Young white addict
passed out pants down
in the hallway by the florist.
Brown boys preach
the gospel while two young
women sing the hymns
in the background with
a post office as backdrop.
Harmonious with the coin tokens
cracking in fare
machines while tapping
soulless soles clack on
cement and tile.
Arteries crisscrossed
as trolley tracks and subway
platform valves, commuters in and out
of turnstiles, Taco Bells and tiny shops
moving like millions of blood cells.
Above at City Hall,
skin councilmen
create cash cache
in taxes, budgets
bulging and shrinking
ordinances ordinary
like late lunches and old marble floors,
down here lives the struggle.
Down here lives oil and incense,
businesses, bootleg dvds and a black man
shuffling along in a tarnished wheelchair begs
"May god bless me, sir"
with outstretched empty hands.
Body Read

I understand you love her,
but I don’t want that for us.
I just want to explore the way
your nails carve your pain into
my back when I enter my fingers,
between those guarded flesh doors.
When she’s not home, I’ll fill the void
over weekends, evenings, my head
pressed against the space where moans
make your spine fold inward.
So go ahead, fill my mouth
one by one with your fingertips,
as if you’re dangling plump grapes
by their branches.
I run the palms of my hand
on the arch of your back,
how it tells stories no books
have the spine to carry.
I’m not asking for anything
you don’t already want.
Anaisa

City sidewalks crack
from the eruption
in the basement
of a tenement building.
The rapture of drumming,
chants of antilles yoruba
descendants pounds at my heart.

I enter the room
where bodies move
in the haze
of candle lights,
sweet perfumes,
paleros and paleras
loose in a sea of rum,
radiant in their delirium.

In the corner of the room,
the distraction that stops
my wandering eye.

There she is.
Pushing back
the tambourines,
she begins to tongue
the muttering of
possession and release.
Anaisa.
She who spins
seven times, I submit to her hips.

I, infatuated by this chase.
I, entangled in the ringlets
she blows from her cigar smoke.
Her sweat traveling
on the bridge
made by the arch
of her back.
My desire to be near
her is always the deepest thirst.
As she dances
she raises her hands
above her head,
then lets it fall by her waist,
above her head,
then falls by her waist.
In her movements
I discover what it means
to stand at the edge of heat.
What is, moves and what is moving is, us.

For years, I have come
to watch her this way,
All the while wondering
whose bed she has rested her head in.
I’ve wondered whose embrace
of full firm flesh she’s kept.
Which soft corners
of tasted lips has she opened?

I’ve put the honey and sea water
by my bed, acknowledge my needs
of sweetness and cleansing,
I am sore,
she is soft.

For years I’ve forced
myself to forget her effect
Filled in the empty
void of her time
in between the legs,
fucks, moans of other women.
Made myself drunk
on jealousy and bourbon
high on lust and kush.
Just to get closer.
Just to say we danced
one more time.

But I know her to well
and each dance resolves
itself in fucking and crying.
She’s not mine, nor ever will be.
She’s Anaisa.
She belongs to everyone.
Origins of the Word Cunt

_after reading Stone Age Divas_

From Cuneiform,
the most ancient form of writing,
from kunta, female genitalia
in Sumerian of ancient Iraq.
Kunta is woman,
quna, queen, priestesses
counting the money of temples,
wealth of ancient mother cultures,
queens, Prostitute, the law giver of the temple.
Whore, is houri, Persian for gorgeous
divine female that awaits her lovers in the seventh heaven.

Kunta  root of kundalini, energy.
Cunt   the energy within.
Khan   Matriarchal
Cunda, mother of Buddha,
Cunti-Devi, goddess of kundalini energy,
Kun, goddess of Mercy in India,
Quani, Korean goddess,
Qudshu, priestess of ancient Canaan & Phoenicia,
Qu'    love, sensuality, sexuality, the divinity present in all.

Koran or Quran,
a reading, the book of love
for female sensuality, spoken
from the mouths of mothers of
the Arab people
teachers before Mohamad dictated the Koran.
Muslim is a mother,
word, from the mother root: Mohamad,
ufti, mosque, madrasa, Makka,
Madina, mukhtar, mujahadeem, mezes, taste,
mezes, snack, on cunts, more, love,
more, cunt, more, more.
The Yard

They are someone's babies, making a pulp of each other, pocket sized prides, little animals, playing roughly in the cells, making murals of the walls, pseudo-manhoods, elementary honor, they think they know the dignity in being respected.

Ten young boys beating senseless someone's child. Puss bulging like a muscle in the raw red oven of his eye, the blood is everywhere; becomes disorderly and hyper, dancing into a jive on the wall, salsa'don the mirrors of the cell, in the pillows, the blood was hiding on the bed, smiling, the blood was laughing from the swelled-bunk of the boy eyelid.

His mama gets to witness the savage aftermath of fists, on Sunday family visits, her child, a cooked dumpling, jail-rocked, strangled, whooped into the prized bitch of the yard. Turns into something to talk about, nothing that needs saving, nothing to change, why salvage the chains on the little boys, them "lil niggers'll ruin anything that they get their hands on" best they have a place to sort it all out, best we not disturb the little brown boy chaos inside of them.
Adante

Your eyes are always in my head
like a mountain morning,
rising heat and light--
every sixth wave is you
your fingers on the lips
of this poem--
the fecundity of your curls
in a dance,
your tongue of sweet pineapple
with a flirt of coconut--
How does it feel to have me
think about you?
Wishing that these words were
enough to consume you, as I am only
allowed to have you in the closed
spaces, where I try to fill the gaps
by the ones who left you.
We sing a larger melody
of ingredients as we run into the nature
of ourselves locked like two wolves.
There is peaceful, there is wild
we are both at the same time.
I want to stay with you all afternoon
evening, night, into tomorrow pressed
into you so tightly we don’t know
whose belly made what sound
whose heart it is thumping like
that-- until I don’t know if the sweat
on my chest is yours or mine or ours.
I know it hurts, you open
yourself up to me I press on bruises
you hide and you shy away
while I hope I could share this place with you
What if I write of you?
Is that more love than you can handle?
Let the things I tell you survive,
the air after strumming of a new guitar
Basura Birth

after Miguel Piñero

Before the beginning
God was already colonized
so, the beginning was basura
pero, Bomba created the campo
anyway and Bomba saw that
this was bueno.
So Bomba said,
“Let there be music in the campo”
bariles, maracas, y cuás rose from the earth.
Pero Bomba saw this was not enough sabor
Entonce, Bomba created campesinos to
dance y soil to vibrate y sound to move threefold
through the land of earth colored peoples.

On the second day,
Bomba’s hands were cramped from working
the cane harvest, her knees strangled by the sun
so she couldn’t dance like wepa,
Bomba in all her salvageable wisdom,
because all you can do is salvage from basura,
entiende? knew she needed help
So Bomba created Plena and told her
“Keep that tradition beat flowin’ mama.”
So Plena merged with los campesinos, y they sang, y they sang
And Bomba saw that this was bueno.

On the third day,
Plena was walking through Ponce in a shawl of Borikén
when she was assaulted raped, and dragged to America
Who begat occupation
Who begat exploitation
Who begat the Dream
Who begat forgetting
Who begat hollowed words,
common wealth
Who begat Nuyorican
Who begat Natiao
And Bomba knew
And Bomba saw
pero Bomba,
her strength gone after years of begat
sat in the campo and wept
until her tears were salvaged
Few Basic Steps of Salsa

[Step]

Hips veering about in a warm fluid
of youth, you clack your heels and swing
your pretty ribs in gallant yaw,
the gorgeous frill of your red dress
flapping over ankle: that tuck, and the slit.
Rosy and bulky were the kinks that came down
and melted off muscle from your thighs,
patient as a corpse, you slither and pop,
aiming the ball of your foot down and dipping into a sleek,
neat coil snapping back into stiff spine, fingers skewed
along the skinny gash of your garb;
you are stealing the eyes while batting your body in cute frolic

(Transfer)

Your husband, (a young, thirsty bullet waiting
in the distance) slid between your legs
Gallant in your matchless stride, you glide in the ghost of a young girl dream,
remembering how desperately you wanted to be woman, how desperately you wanted to
be desired, sweet offbeaté plié, distant eyes climbing you as you gather your dress away
from the machine of your legs. There is a special slowing of your soul, now, balanced in
cool reminiscing, sought on pleasing the nimble tender bone of wanting. Your hips slide
in his palm like chocolate. His eyes are cuffs. You believe in death and life as one co-
existence.

(Change)

In mature age, you are still fruit, giggling,
dazzling the new shutter of my camera;
fingers twisted in young nostalgia,
remembering the Mexican cocktail your husband awarded
you thirty years ago. Lounging in that young girl dream, bubbling,
like a catalogue of goose-bumps lining the arms of a child,
naked, in a black newborn autumn’s wind,

You are remembering the clack your heels once bestowed. How you used to step in and
out of form, feeling the spaces where the wood would mourn you and obey your return,
thrilled as you danced your self out of your body and unto the shoulders of night, like a
shawl.
Foxtrot

She is the wild mushroom, the fancy brainchild who prefers self over obsession, the snapped napkin, the patted lip before a sip of Sauvignon, the one that muscles jovial thoughts between bites. She knows how to be your only. The no thank you, the yes please, the fox who swallows the tiny urges in between her thighs to preserve self.

You are just too beautiful, you’ll say.

Catecalling, battling feverishly with your beast, saliva drizzling down your pearly skivers, you’ll wish there was enough muscle in your method. You’ll believe yourself to be innocent enough to fathom her without the lusty overlap, but truth is, you are too young to be sincere, too bulk with childish urge,

and this woman is too woman for you.
Her scent; crude and hot, forbidden in glissade,
This lush of light and warm butter,
Like buttons of butterscotch and mint,

skilled in the language of fuck, she will curve you, politely.
Her pleasant return, faint and skittering; a respectful response, but, none the less, as short pull of the joint.

The tone of her “thank you ma’am” will be so devilishly gentle. It will make you believe that she is something to be conquered, be careful not to think you may have what has not pounced you,, careful not to be offspring of the urge.

Be that jitter too tricky to corral, something ill may level in you, find yourself both as devil and damsel, stealing the sweet spot, shackled and the beat like a caged pervert who couldn’t keep her hands to herself.

Just appreciate the scent, let it tickle your gums let her be the slice of pie, that doesn’t fill your stomach, but still is respectful enough to your tongue, that you praised her short stay; the glacé of thought, slipping out of sight and fleeting, yet, without vain.
Finding Sappho

attraction for mosquito lovers,

, bite my hand, itch by itch
, I exhausted you

bodies screamed into the pillow,

, loose guitar string; the black heat of the open oven door inside: our thrusts

I loved,

ah depression, disaster so pocket sized,

I was never here.

I do not want to be the

just let your heart dance in an open space, damn it

we were more knife and butter;

like the hot fresh sex of a bullet hissing through flesh,

my ego, got to get over it.
The Little Girl in La Villita

Shoes untied as she climbs a set of 300
year old cobblestone stairs in America’s
oldest neighborhood, eyes as wide as
the Texas sun that sets behind her. Fearless, she grips the
hand rails as she scales the outside corners of the stairs, counting
“uno, dos, tres”—all the way up to 20. She pauses—giggling, her laughter
sounds like like the fluttering of wings from the birds that fly past her.
She is stuck up in the air like leaves the wind does not pick up, wanting
something she does not yet have the language for.

Her father runs towards her, he yells “¡hija de puta!—bájate de ahí, puñeta!”
If only, he would love her wild. I wonder how many fathers have shamed
their daughters for climbing too high?
The Photographer, Fading

We are ink frozen, dancing
in the skinned house
weaving through the den
of ceramic frogs, the salt
and pepper shakers
dressed in the mask of hens

Five children
cousins with the breath
of mango leaves
pinned to our hair, sweating
beneath a cloak of vinyl
in a dusty photo album.

*

I peel the photograph from its page,
drawing of light
suddenly heavy

a body

whose thread
has been pulled through
and through
a body
heavy with the shock of empty.

*

I touch the gloss.
My fingers listen for what memory
will not say:
A woman becomes a mirage
a click behind the shutter
an echo of gold bangles
taking this picture.

*

Touch will say what memory dare not:
Images remain
while a photographer fades
yellowing in the bones
of the walls, vanishing
into the lean of a darkened house.
Same Dream Since 11 Years Old

It starts with me exiting the train late
nights on the blue line cutting across steel
spine stories, where movie road posters decorate
the walk home. I am dry mouthed, eyes blood shot
pigeons hobbling past me. Walking home on city
streets that look like maggot decay, paint chipping
off the walls, the block chaotic–
why is he on top of me, why am I too scared to move?
What time is it? I am sleeping,
his apathy lingers, quiet and suffocating
I hobble counting the steps, leaving a trail.
A reminder of how I couldn’t escape.
Impact Play

Cautiously entering bed sheets too afraid
to bare its being beautiful before you,

this body has too many scars from
an already waged war across its flesh

as brown, as queer, as woman. These breast
that you suckle for sweet taste, while I plead

to have wrists cuffed, to feel sharp cracks
of whips on my back, have a history

bound to slavery and master’s whips used
to mark our backs to say we don’t exist.

This body has passed through streets where
I’ve been told: "All they need is a good dick right?"

Towards too many lovers I have said:
“all you need is my good dick right?”

This body that moans and croons a cadence of
ay mami y cariño mío was birthed from islands

where rape was an intergenerational norm.
From an island where my mother’s cries for la policía

fell to deaf ears because el hombre’s power on the island
cannot recognize that rape can happen between man and wife.

I fuck to feel alive. Gasping and glowing,
using my lips to pen heated haikus

along your inner thighs as your legs weigh heavy
on my shoulders, sweet torture, you ride me harder

take deep breathes and scream my name,
I want to have this body fucked in a language

where fear doesn't exist.