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BEAUTIFUL Mentirosa

Maria Billini

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I.

When Gentlemen Prefer Virginia Slims

After Math

Before her lips stick
and fuchsia stains my collar,

before her vanilla perfume soaks
into the openness
of black pillows,

before sex evolves into intimacy
growing ears and lips
designed for conversation.

Before I inhale her air,
replace gangsta rap
with neo soul,
and retire my playstation,

before she can say,
"I'm not like the others,"
convince me with her presence
of my aftermath,

before coffee table water rings
can sit long enough to dry
to forever remind me
of her existence,

my resistance,
put her in a taxi.

Double Negative

I could never
catch
your shadow,
my breath,
our reflection,
together
long enough
to notice
if I had your eyebrows,
your Sicilian nose,
or your grotesque
yet vacant smile.

So I hung
from your kilo long
corporate red –tied
myself to your titanic desk,
and tabled my ABC's
on your to-do list
ASAP.
No use,
shadows shook
I'm shunned.

We tired
like the October Chase
that browns the golden orange
hues of leaves that knew
the secrets of Indian summers.

You remarried a positive.
Subtracted the double negatives
as mother lifted herself
I learned how to shave,
drive a stick shift,
and made love
to a pretty brunette
for the first time.

I'm a father now
with a giant shadow
my son can touch.

Phone Sex

On the Manhattan cross street
 of "It's over" and "I hate you"
 we had a civilized adios.
 Minus mala palabras
 swallowing kitchen knives
 dipped in picante,
 I kept her name
 just as beautiful as it was
 the day her mother named her.

I know you don't believe me. But I really don't miss her.
 Ni siquiera un poco.

She never really got me.
 My lack of gentleman,
 my abundance of Heinekens,
 my addiction to 1965 El Dorados
 or my obsession with her
 perfect graffiti pieced face,
 coquitos kisses,
 and the jobless freckles
 I licked off her nose
 and employed as my new taste buds.

It's been a year since we broke up. I never got my Teddy Pendergrass
 album back. And she will never get an apology.

On lonely nights when the bed sheets get so cold
 that they stick to the wall and slap
 my goose bumps inside out,

I picture her laying on her side of the bed,
 naked and fully arrested in sleep.

I fondle my phone, drunk dial her number,
 wonder if she'll answer and say my name once more.

Ring... Ring...

Hello?

Click.

The Guitarist

Baby,
these brownstones blues, cheesecake crimes
and double-dutch affairs are Brooklyn.
So are we.

In Brooklyn the Italians advised us to Fuhgetaboutit,
the Haitians weaved New York dreams,
and the Puerto Ricans simply watched the sunset
while we bumped into each other like two Staccato notes.

I had eight dollars, three quarters, two nickels,
and a melody in my pocket the day I met you.

I gulped in your eyes, inked my smile in your memory,
hoping you would remember the guitarist.

Not the change, the Chinese takeout,
or even the hole in my sneaker.

Your name, a splash of urban noise
romanticized the electrical charge produced by a muted city,

as we wrote our lyrics on the pavement,
pulsed tunes, perfected chords created by strings,
and released vibrations surfed with callused fingertips, and rubber palms.

Baby,
This isn't Love... Its Rock and Soul
and I was your sound,
you were my wave,
and Brooklyn the ears that took us in.

The Painter

You didn't have to hold still,
or pose, or smile, or reline divine eyes,
or make wishes on homeless eyelashes,
or plow through fields of freckles,
or disguise deltas that appeared when you squinted.

You didn't have to smooth out unruly hairs
that protested against your eyebrows,
or tilt your face $67\frac{1}{2}$ degrees
towards the Virgo constellation,
or hold your stomach in,
or adjust the lighting,

You didn't have to alter the color your lips,
unlock your locks, expose your breasts,
or highlight the beauty marks that sprinkled
the corners of your womanly physique.

I didn't need to fret over a rigger,
to align the symmetrical angles of your face,
any fan brush would capture the wonder
of your skyscraper cheeks.

My hand did not tremble, hesitate, or question
how I should glide the brush over a canvas
thirsty to resemble your likeness.

I didn't have to perfect a brush stroke,
wait for paint to soak through the whiteness,
blend the perfect coconut white with whole wheat brown
for a flesh color tone.

Fuchsias, magentas, pinks filled your lips,
as black olives tinted your hair.

I didn't have to call myself an artist,
recall my training, compare you to
murals of the Mona Lisa.

I was simply a man with eyes,
a paintbrush, and you, my apparition
as perfect as God intended.

I took notice
and put you
in my painting.

Francheska

When she says margarita she means daiquiri.
 When she says decaf she means black and sugary.
 When she says “largate,” what she really means is “esperame.”

But who was I to try to read her.
 Miles stretched like king sized linens between us,
 I in New York hailing a cab as I tried to balance an iced latte
 and my cell phone all at once while leaving her machine a message.

“Hey remember me, I loved you under the Orlando stars and pressed your flyaway’s down in the sticky Florida humidity. You were so worried about your hair, but as soon as the curls sprung up I thought ‘wow she’s perfect.’ Recuerdas how I licked the salt off your arm...And how we renamed all of those bird streets into famous salseros...yeah so instead of Flamingo street we called it “Celia Cruz” Street...Well, llamame. Okay. Please. I miss you.”

When she says sex she means sex.
 When she says love she means poetry.
 When she says “perdoname” what she really means is “olvidate.”

Forget her. Entirely. Starting with her name Francheska with a K not a C she would always say. Half smirking. Half winking. Her freckles that she covered with makeup. My favorite part of her face. Her tiny little feet and her toe nail polish which I always picked out for her. The only thing I ever picked. And our late night pillow talks when we counted space and time during September thunderstorms.

We were always off. By a mile or two, a train stop, a cab ride, a city, a state, a state of mind, a state of loving, a state of sexing. I in the Bronx, She in queens. I in Puerto Rico, she in the Dominican Republic. If she was hot, yo con frio, if I turned on the lights, she wanted them off. If I sneezed she hiccupped.

When she says “lingerie,” she means “nudity.”
 When she says “I forgive you,” she means “I will never belong to you.”
 When she says, “fuck you,” she means “I still love you.”

So I sit here in my tiny Washington Heights apartment, on the corner of Wadsworth and 191st Street writing her a letter, because I know it takes just as much passion to hate someone, as it does to love someone. Because I know she will read it. Fold it up carefully and contemplate whether I still remember what she feels like.

Blue Dress

I almost choked on my Jack Daniels when I saw her in that blue dress.
 I figured she knew the effect she had on me,
 on all men, on the direction of the wind when she wore it.

Nature has a way of defining its laws of attraction, for me it was simple.
 If a chick threw on heels, a dress, and smelled like berry fruit snacks,
 I was game.

But I believe the dress had a mind of its own,
 a bed of its own, that it slept in.
 I imagined the dress woke up in the morning, chugged a red bull,
 and chose to wear her,
 not the other way around.

Her Blue was like a virgin Ferrari waiting to be driven, like a courtside seats at a
 Knicks game, like fireworks on my birthday. Swimming in her floating on her
 water line waves, and becoming that one in a million blue lobster that crawls out
 of the sand only to be captured and devoured.

 I wanted to bathe her in adjectives,
 but my hands spoke in verbs instead.
 She allowed my fingers to walk across her lap,
 graze her collarbone, and detangle her knotty hair.

She liked her liquor sweet, but not sex.

So we fucked like soldiers at war.
 Heavily armed, hidden in fatigues, quiet yet violent.

We fucked under bombs of insecurity exploding over our heads,
 over dead bodies that haunted hotel rooms,
 with a feverish life or death urgency.

 We fucked like a Chinese New Year celebration,
 her ass firm like a new set of Goodyear tires,
 and her heart heavy like a neon pink
 bowling ball.

When it was over,
I glanced at her as she lay limp and conquered.
She looked like she had been in labor,
lying there in the sweaty afterbirth of our fuck fest.

Damn I needed a shower.

“How was that?” she asked in a disheveled Buddha stance.
I picked up her blue dress from the floor and replied,
“Will you put this back on?”

You read my horoscope,
Planets align this week,
You will find love,
In the warm waters with a Pisces,
You squirm, you're a cancer.

We ask for the check, proof that this night happened,
documentation of our physicality,
and you tally up the crumbs,
the bills, the hours of sleep you missed, and the silent Thursdays .

I'm not going to clean my fingernails, cover up my tattoos, sit up straight,
promise you a para siempre, remember how you like your coffee, or bother
reading your horoscope.

You unread the fine print, wrote up your own instructions,
assembled only to disassemble me.

I throw the newspaper out.
No one wants to read yesterdays paper.

When Gentlemen Prefer Virginia Slims

Mama tried to raise a gentleman under foggy Philly Fridays plagued
with chalk outlines of 16 year old black boys
that grew up next door to us.

I received report card raves and bedside Baptist blessings that kept me believing
in something. Dressed in my Sunday best with shoes so shiny you could see God
in them, I would listen as she sang lullabies that echoed off the pissy walls
of the brotherly love projects.

She faked it long enough to say, “We ain’t ghetto”, filled my pockets with
quarters to ensure that I spoke proper English, and gave me three daddies to
replace the one who never loved me.

My church daddy gave long passionate sermons electrocuting all who listened.
He was better than Jimi Hendrix with his verbal electric guitar, so I listened and
prayed.

My second daddy threw algebraic equations in the air, juggled vocabulary words
like apples, and made the pen samba its way into perfect cursive lettering.

My third daddy changed faces, names, and addresses. Sometimes he lived with us
for an undetermined amount of time, sometimes he visited, and sometimes he beat
her like dusty rugs over a rickety rail.

Then there were those moments when a man defines his love in its bare minimum,
and during those times he would desire her just as much as he loved his whiskey,
crispy Benjamins, and sex with anyone new.

Still mama tried to raise a gentleman, a real man, beautiful with the face
of a pharaoh, angular, brown, exquisite like the drowning of a Jamaican sun,
with arms that attempted to hug planets and squeeze stars until they
exploded like super nova’s,

A man with strong legs like North American conifers, forever green wallets,
“cuz a real man always keeps money in his pockets even if but a nickel to shine
his shoes”.

I grew tall like the pyramids, memorized the book of genesis, gathered enough
scholarly evidence to speak of my beginning, spoke with a steady mouth

that was selectively permeable only releasing 24karat words, African Red, Yellow and Green, Circle, Triangle, Square, Look, Listen, and learned all I could but it wasn't enough. I could never be a Black Jesus.

Still Mama tried to raise a gentleman, yet persistence didn't and couldn't override rebellion, so I shave my wooly crown, tattoo shapes upside down, sing in stolen voices, write poems about nothing, star in productions about my own production, paint in hip hop pinks, soulful silvers, gospel greens, and jazz-tinted yellows. Kissed girls on prom night. Kissed boys in dark closets. Smoked weed till the high wasn't high enough. Prayed for change while I begged for change, shake it up in my cup and count the same quarters mama gave me as a kid.

Mama tried to raise a gentleman...As she tried I lied to pretty Caribbean ladies promising marriage and babies, sexin till I forgot the maybes, turning their bodies into confessionals as I broke the laws of attraction and smoked their rolled up skins like cigars. I didn't like cigars but I smoked them, tipped my hat like the cowboy on the Marlboros packs. I spit like a man, fucked like man, broke promises like a man.

And when the night unfolded the possibility of immunity, I climbed onto the fire-escape, my hand on his crotch, and blew pretty little ringlets as I prefer to smoke Virginia Slims.

II.

Urban Brujeria

Freak show

Put a band aid on your lips,
sprinkle vinegar in your eyes,
swallow dish detergent,
and wait for the cleansing

You self righteous son of bitch.

Oblivious to reality you walk over turds and scoff, smoke and cough,
fuck your way into a warm bed and free breakfast,
as you count your moolah but not your blessings.

You call hotlines but forget to call your mother
and the only love you've ever known
is expensive labels with Italian names.

Idiota!

you are a misspent credit card,
a misspelled crossword puzzle,
and a missed train that leaves you stranded in the desert
standing in a puddle of your own feces.

Would you like to make a collect call?

Please deposit 25cents and your sins into the slot.

Its not me who's looking back at you,
when you position the mirror directly ahead,
stand before it butt naked, exposing your stab wounds,
bucktoothed smirk, bloodshot eyes, and ingrown hairs,
just like a puppy wet in amniotic fluids.

Except no one wants to adopt you.

We are orphans of life.

The shemale who sports her tranny titts loud and proud, the wall street sex addict, the devout Catholic Porn Star, the soldier with post traumatic stress disorder, the teacher who can't read, the writer who can't spell, the little black girl who bleaches her skin, the model who starves herself, the dirty cop, the HIV positive doctor, the pedophile priest, the vegetarian, the butcher, the hair dresser, the lesbian, the Jew, the skinhead, and the neighbor.

Welcome to the freak show.

Lady Poeta

I dreamed I died
 came back to life
 reincarnated into a lady poeta.
 I was composed of action words
 that threw Bruce Lee punches
 aimed at millionaire mayors
 and a billion Karate nouns
 for the million hoodie march.
 I had skin smooth like
 lined notebook paper
 and lips so fast they shot verbal bullets
 right through rich republicans
 that didn't give a damn about my people!

My words
 were shining
 and grinding
 and rising
 above the racial profiling,
 above the spanglish silencing,
 above the washed up salseros
 and abandoned bodegas.

My words
 were marching
 and climbing
 and riding
 the back of the bus
 till we reached freedom avenue.
 and a correct Latino census.

My words protest
 the grotesque injustice
 and not just this
 but the high school dropouts
 who will graduate from Rikers
 I dreamed I died
 came back to life
 reincarnated into a lady poeta,
 curing junkies, mothering prostitutas,

throwing pennies at the santos
with words strong like platanos
that gave CPR to those who would listen.

my words were tornadoes of truth,
fast like a metro card swipe,
fast like a Dominican taxista
slaying haters, exposing liars,
and selling dreams in a cuchifrito near you.

Red Planet

it's that time of the month and I have come full orbit
readily releasing my red planet into outer space.
black, airless, weightless.

don't be afraid to ask questions,
even the lack of gravity can't stop curiosity.

whoever said women are from venus must have been a man. definitely. an intellectual
who wears glasses that hang low on his face and has never tasted a woman at her most
raw and undefined hour. I will tell him what it means to give birth,
and hold a piece of the
universe in your uterus.

I would tell him who I am... 100% martian. 100% mujer.

my body feels like it was designed solely for sex,
liquid lava builds up in my genitals, and I just want to
dance.scream.sweat.curse.love.fuck.laugh.explode.

instead I write a poem and wash it down
with a tall glass of something. sssh this is called inspiration.

my breasts swell up like two full moons
lighting up the dreamless sky
blinding anyone who stares for too long.

and they do. stare.
makes me wonder, are they on to me?
have they discovered my universal secret, that I am the bloody goddess, derivative of *la virgen maria*, shake hands with the dead and amaze the living. and when I jump on the bronx bound 4 train I turn all heads, and dogs get a little closer to sniff me, and my nipples are torpedos ready to blast, and my hair a little thicker, and my lips move a little quicker. and I don't care who I offend when my lovemaking is transformed into sex for the furious, and jesus has conversations with me about what he should improve on, and I can see across mountains, and walk over rivers, and I don't need anything but a great bolero, a pen, a cigarette, an aspirin and a mating call. and my senses are heightened and a lollypop is an ice cream cone, a chicken nugget is a T-bone steak, a melody is a symphony, a word is a sonnet, a kiss is an orgasm. and you have been blessed.

And to think this is a monthly phenomenon.

Oye Abuelito

Listen, to my spanglish
 goodbye bolero
 screaming deseos
 desires to scoop up the Santo Domingo stars
 sling shot them over Brighton 15th street,
 just for you grandpa from your little gringa.

I would have sang Bachatas classicas
 as we found lucky pennies,
 bathed them in ketchup
 to make them shine again,
 held them in our pockets
 as we sat in mass
 trying to find faith again,

Oye Viejito,
 like a Dominican cowgirl,
 I would have lassoed in la luna
 close enough for you
 to notice the delicate beading
 on her celestial wedding gown,
 as she married the heavens
 divorcing dawn, divorcing us.

If Walter Mercado's crystal ball
 reflected Alzheimer in time,
 I would have captured
 the scent of las palmas in glass jars,
 released the tangy Caribbean odors,
 like zebra butterflies,
 all over your living room.
 I would have laid layers
 on top of layers
 over your bed
 of white sands
 from Boca chica,
 grown mangoes and pinas
 sweet from La romana,
 planted Franboyans

and worn their
red flowers in my hair.

Adios Viejito,
You died in August similar to the summer of 95,
when you rode your bike through Coney island
imagining the terrain of La Republica,
as you avoided grooves on the boardwalk,
before your legs retired and my name expired.
I would have rolled out las Montanas bonao like a red carpet,
filled our glasses with Brugal and made a toast con carino
I would have sent you back home
even for a day.

If I knew.

Palm Reader

If I were a palm reader

I would have read las lineas de sus manos

A six year old girl sitting on his belly I bounced every time he laughed, gripping his hands for balance.

I would have studied these lines,
their intersections

points of connections.

Places where they almost touched but not quite.

If I were a palm reader

I would have seen it all,

Una vida entera, or in my case incompleta
y este dia tambien

as I sat today in tangerine government chairs
more plastic than plastic
should be allowed to be.

He arrives and motions

I know we used to play that same telephone game except it was a hot pink toy phone, an imaginary prince on the other line, and there wasn't a bulletproof glass between us.

We get through the small talk the unimportant details that keep a man sane. I tell him "La familia is good, little Tito is getting big. A promotion at work, yeah yeah my dique boyfriend is there."

This keeps la mente trabajando, y yo esperando.

But I would wait longer he had another year, and these moments,
bleak and processed were now part of our lives.

As I wait, I trace his hand with disappointed fingers and he can almost feel me, despite the glass that separates us like a massive black universe neither one of us understands.

"I love you Papi." I tell him como una cancion vieja,
an old record we loved so much
it doesn't play anymore.

No one complains. The lyrics are memorized.
I swallow what feels like a gallon of sour milk in my throat,
and I count the silver canas, focus on his untrimmed mustache
and how it sways unevenly over his chapped lips.

He tells me, “yo se que tu quieres llorar mija.”

So I cooperate,
 letting lagrimas stream down
 wetting the dry grid that frames my cheeks

“Esta tristesa es ajena”

I was broken, not by him
Not this time.
He smiles places his palm on the glass,
his body heat morphing, steaming the image,
distorting the lines,
Looks at me and says,

“Don’t ever let another man hurt you the way I did.
I made a mistake. They do it on purpose.”

Las Barajas

We had to wait till after midnight
 when all eyes were sealed tight like sardines in suenos,
 and in that dim kitchen only the cucarachas were out dancing merengue
 and fighting over the leftover tostones that fell between the sink and stove.

We waited till god took his usual kit kat break
 because we knew he wouldn't approve.
 We waited till you lit your Kool 100 cigarette like an orange star in a black cielo,
 till your sangria red nail polish dried and your coffee, hot and steady,
 was poured into your favorite taza.

“Don't rush me nina,
 you can't rush these kinds of things.”

You were right, Mami. You couldn't rush magic, it arrived like a resistant
 apology when it had finally matured past the awkward and rebellious teenage
 years. Like suerte. The kind of luck that wins you mega millions in la loteria, the
 kind of luck that makes breast cancer one day up and disappear, the kind of luck
 that saved premature babies not much bigger than a cell phone.

So I watched as my mother shuffled las barajas which in itself seemed like a
 magic trick. She shuffled and shuffled and the ash that grew on the tip of her
 cigarette never once fell or betrayed her permission.

I listened as each tarot card spanked the other softly yet firmly.

As each card united, separated, and reunited like Marvin Gaye's distant lovers
 wet with vino blanco and a desire to make their teflon love stick like crazy glue.

But this was Santeria not voodoo,
 so I divide the shriveled and tattered deck
 composed of aged cards into three piles.

“Por ti, por tu casa, y por lo que te espera.”

She says as she turns the cards over to peer into my world
 and I hold my breath like an acrobat on a balance beam.

“Dinero, mucho dinero”, she says fortune is coming my way.

“Un Corazon partido, but not for long,” she winks.

“Y una mudanza, you will be part of a new place.”

We get through the tarot symbols, the knives, the gold coins, the green and yellow vegetables, the doors both opened and closed, the men on horses, the women who hold fire and ice, she smiles and says,

“Now go live this life before someone else does.”

On the Uptown Side

By this time of the day the moon has kidnapped
the last eight hours and she is completely arrested
by fatigue.

Her perfume has worn off, she can no longer taste
her lipstick, and only a fraction
of who she was at dawn remains.

She walks the yellow line, an urban tight rope,
as giant rodents dance over electrical signals.

There were signals everywhere,
red lights, green lights,
Uptown, downtown,
the minutes remaining for the next Bronx bound train.

Growing up in the city
she was trained to read signals.

She sits on a wooden bench,
fingers through her old receipts
as a Spanish guitar is stroked
the way women should be,
the way most women will never be touched.

He is about 65 years old,
his eyes are hollow black diamonds,
his teeth are invisible, and his thin caterpillar skin transparent.
His hands are large and veiny, his fingers are rough and experienced,
his voice a gingersque whiskey attacks you when you're not ready,
seeps into the air, and pays tribute to the only woman he has ever loved.

He plays his instrument without breathing,
without the concept of time or place,
without the separation of mind and body,
without a need for money or fame,
and without the interruption of life.

He sings his MTA melody and she blinks into a distant memory, she is 8 years old, on the uptown side, holding yellow chalk, jumping in and out of numbered boxes, singing, waiting for the train.

He is there younger, playing his guitar with smoother and less experienced fingers, singing with her, they look at each other and she walks away forever imprinted.

She blinks the train quickly approaching, the platform vibrating, the old man singing and living, and she too is living.

Transported

I couldn't see him, but I knew god
 was on the other side of that wall
 smoking a cigar, painting his toenails,
 all while holding his favorite yoga position.

He was waiting for me to question his blueprint,
 question why he had allowed the existence
 of people I had met, men I had loved,
 and shitty apartments I had inhabited with no hot water
 and leaks that formed tits bigger than mine
 on my bathroom ceiling.

He waited for me to tell him in a Ricky Ricardo voice,
 "Lucy you got some explaining to do?"

He should have known that I would be back for an explanation,
 to see how the old apartment changed,
 how they re-arranged the furniture,
 how they stacked my unread mail,
 how the air hijacked memories into aromas.

How life continued with my absence very present.

But nothing has changed really.
 My mom still cooks with the lights off,
 sings loud over hot boiling pots of water
 and never burns herself.

My sister still paints every ones' face but her own,
 without her hand ever touching the canvas,
 without her hands period.

My brother still reinvents himself
 today he is a born again teenager,
 despite boredom, despite disease, despite himself.

My other sister is magically composed of glitter, flowers that never die,
 and a forever laughter. She could not, would not, did not cry
 at my grandfathers' funeral.

My oldest brother continues be unaware,
of the small things in that old apartment
that despite science make us all visible to the naked eye.

Finally my grandmother sits on her bed reliving a lifetime through photographs
that speak while everyone sleeps. She holds my grandfathers hands, hears him
singing, and realizes death is but an illusion.

When I am transported back to my childhood home I surrender
to this unchanging mechanism.

I surrender to warm oddities.
I surrender to space disconnecting
and reconnecting around me.

I surrender
because the only one
who has changed is me.

She couldn't work miracles but miracles worked with her,
she negotiated with dope fiends that were shooting up on the clouds,
talked the suicidal husbands off the ramp of the George Washington Bridge,
and pleaded with the pretty girls to spread college dreams not their legs.

She rose up from the earth's crust like a phoenix,
caught lightning bolts from Chango like Frisbees,
and swam alongside her mother Yemeya like two glow-in-the-dark mermaids.

And to experience her was to be born into her.

We all fell in love...
porque tu me hiciste brujeria

totally jonesing with her bluest light, her sweetest pineapple, and all the heaven
and all the hell and all the dust that twirled inside of her.

III.

The Overdose

Hiccup

We are naked, you and I,
like our favorite New York
City side street
cluttered with the drone
of the nine to five.

We sit here in yellow sweat,
lice infested, swallowing eyelashes,
swapping germs, and exhaling poetry
that pays tribute to a bloody sky
and a black president.

There is no escape from the 99 percent
or this 1200 a month Hamilton asylum
we call *home sweet home*. Jump
into microwave meals, count calories
till your fingers commit suicide. Eat it all.

Days violently sneeze dusk
as we blend into graffiti styrofoam walls,
pay tribute to the present afterlife, resist
genitals that spit, and hiccup in soft voices
during the blur of the ten o' clock news,

"I love you, dear."

420 friendly

“I don’t smoke”,
 she said as he passed her the blunt.
 Haze like freshly cut heaven grown grass.

They inhale.

Rolled to perfection he was skilled at these things,
 these “release me from reality things,”
 these “I’m going to survive or swindle you things,”
 these “I’m a criminal but I will love you forever things.”

Blasphemy!

You would think someone like him is an atheist,
 no god, espirtu santo, or guardian angel to shake him straight.
 But he wore his rosary beads like a RUN DMC gold chain.
 The cross swinging over his white tee as he charmed senioritas
 out of Victoria Secret panties and four hundred dollar i-pods.

I pads, I touch.

He touches her like there is no manana, like she will dissolve, disappear,
 and leave behind no trace. He traces her edges with his tongue,
 rolls her in bed sheets, lights her lips with besos that burn. This is an
 experience.

Smoking lovely una mujer. He couldn’t write a poem for his life. So she
 did it for him.

They exhale.

Out of sync

The water stain sits
 on the dresser where you propped my sweaty thighs,
 your smiley faced heroine, and your dollar fifty syringes.
 A sad off white reminder of a tequila fueled night,
 when you popped my bra strap, smudged my lipstick,
 and I almost swallowed your button whole.

We were careless chewing on day old gum and year old infidelities,
 when the *you* with the *her* and the *I* with the *him* was a blur that still burned.
 Holding hands tight until blue veins surfaced for air,
 we gulped “I’m sorry’s” and fucked like we loved each other.

We drink from cracked glasses
 eat off faded china, and walk over unglued kitchen tiles.

The clocks still tick loudly and out of sync.

I am fascinated
 at how little this apartment has changed over time.
 How despite the extra silvers in your beard
 you are just a newer version of the old you
 opaque and stubborn like that miserable water stain.

You ask me to remember the grey flecks in your eyes,
 the way the air smelled after you sprinkled
 my juices over your shoulder, and our talks
 of a world we might never get to see.

“Do you remember, babe?”

You roll your sleeves down,
 I pull my socks up,
 skip breaths between words
 and reply,

“Barely.”

“So let’s dance,”
she says to him as she falls into his arms
falsely believing this chemistry equates love,
the way one loves air when the tightened noose almost asphyxiates you.

Still breathing Carmen will dance until she is convinced
that life is worth living even after her favorite song ends.

Repairs

Harlem hell angels dance around water droplets that find a solid identity.
Breath clouds dissolve in the off-white bedroom as his goose bumps spread.
He should have fixed that window.

A creaky wooden chair holds his jerky body up as he sits.
His half lucid moments force him to taste his bloody tongue,
a familiar metallic sweetness.
He should have thrown that chair away.

Photographs stare back as his eyes roll into the depths of black lids.
Reality no longer consumes time or space.
Dead faces take shape and bleed words.
He should have put those photographs away.

His mother, beautifully cancerous, appears like the “Virgen de Guadalupe”
and says, “I’m always with you” he swallows these words
with an aftertaste of new belief.
He should have made her proud.

With each vacuumed line, cracked reflections
reveal his skeletal face and runny nose. He smiles,
stops,
then snorts some more.
He should have tossed that mirror.

Collapsing into shadows of himself, he stares at the naked loose bulb
flickering overhead like Morse code. He snaps
into the last time he made love, raspberry scented candle light
bounced off her perfect nude body. Those candles are gone now.
He should have fixed that bulb.

Faint spells encase his being like a Bellevue strait jacket,
barely conscious and feeling death's breath on his neck he turns.
There is no dial tone. Only silence. His heart stops.
He should have fixed that phone.

Background Noise

Let us lie

*underneath a coffee stained sky
blend the brown of our skin with the brown of the earth.
Moist, fertilized, this is a reincarnation.*

So that's the poem, what do you think? He asks with half rhymes dangling from his tobacco tinted tongue. I shrug and frown that's how New Yorkers respond. Feels like he wrote this before, serenaded an ex girlfriend who sat unaware of the effort it took him to come up with an ending. Yeah this is déjà vu. Dangerous déjà-poetics that paralyze right hand impulses but still we pop E pills, fill our E tanks with fuel for love. He was from the Boogie, I from Brooklyn, yet we spoke the same language. Keep reading.
I'm almost there.

Let us lie

*among the singing crickets, crack their crispy green scales
during public love making sessions. God is watching
and she's listening intently as we orchestrate nature.
We are the music.*

His poetry is like the salsa songs I grew up on minus the congas and timbales, like hip hop legacies minus Run DMC, like Adidas shell tops minus the stripes, like the Apollo minus the lucky tree stump. Still it's good background noise as we tweak. Its 2:15 in the morning, but my neighbors don't sleep and neither do we. Pass me a cigarette, will ya?
I'm almost there.

Let us lie

*in bed sheets that change colors, sweat through pores that change motives,
and penetrate tonight until tomorrow is born. One day we could be
lovers. But for now, I just want to count your goose bumps,
hundreds of them, and give each single one a reason to exist.*

Newports shrink in mouth-aided bear hugs and ashes falls through gaps in the fire-escape. We stand there squinting as the sun taunts us with her bright slutiness. The darkness is almost over, paintings on the wall lopsided and his poetry subsided. "You should write about this moment", I tell him. Love poems are overrated so we kiss, spit, and blink.
I'm still not in love. Go figure.

Hard Time

It's the clicking of the typewriter that calms him.

The constant crack of silence, as the sturdy machine spits
out letters that form words that form sentences that reveal
that his life sentence feels like a pair of blue balls
on prom night waiting to explode.

Instead he implodes as he counts the years,
one, two, three, no fourteen and counting.
His only friend is the moon which illuminates his cell
long enough for him to trace shadows.

He is a shadow
stranded among other shadows. I bet you don't even know his name.

"I am innocent," says Mr. Jon Adrian Velazquez,
better known as inmate # AA2238, as he recalls the day in 1998
when the NYPD buffaloed him into a precinct for a lineup
into a courtroom for a set up, into a prison cell with no let out,
and finally into a world with no lights.

"I am buried alive" he says, gripping air into fistful knots. He would rather be stoned like
an ancient criminal, run a never ending race, go into the ring with no Everlast gloves and
his arms tied behind his back than live like this.

But there is love in this,
in these long dingy hallways and prison cells. There are two boys
with his blood and face counting calendars. There is a mother
waiting for her son who unfolds dollar bills, reads the green font,

"In God We Trust."

Trust there is hope too that falls on the art of gaining knowledge, on reading books that
collect dust in law libraries, on Dateline specials that make our television sets glow, on
dream team attorneys, political facebook movements, and others out there who believe
that truth is like a key when used properly those handcuffs will open.

So he prays and kisses his santos,
types four letters. L O V E. He can touch love; it's an icy pearl he warms with
his hands. He can taste love, like ripe summer seedless grapes. He can hear
love too. Have midnight conversations with her through dark prison bars.

He can take this life sentence
and lace hard time with hard love.
Get high off it. There is no better narcotic.

Bullet Hole Bliss

Her partially nude and cold body sparkled
 along the glittery Manhattan pavement,
 resembling a twitching fetus
 puked out by the city in a forced abortion.
 Yellow tape tapered her off from the hood
 that once nourished her and now stood
 witness to her murderous spectacle.

She wasn't dead long enough
 for rigormortous to stiffen the bones
 that god had created to redefine
 how salsa was meant to be danced.
 She was dead long enough
 for her caramel hues
 to be replaced by icy blues
 that caked her lips, frosted her skin.
 Face up with eyes open
 to the blackness
 she had a single bullet hole
 that pierced her still smoking,
 most precious ticking organ.
 A pool of black blood
 formed a halo around the body
 gesturing a subtle resemblance
a la Virgen Maria.

Detectives scan the crime scene for evidence
 as bright flashes create Polaroid's
 to capture her post mortem marvel.
 Not far from the victim's body,
 a 9 mm shell case is recovered
 and a wallet filled with green presidents
 rules out the theory of a random robbery gone wrong.
 No defense wounds or signs of a struggle
 imply that the victim knew her attacker.

She loved him,
which explained the carefully unbuttoned blouse
exposing the breasts that just hours ago he had gently kissed.
Year old scars revealed bruises of a feverish affair
that had forever cured her writers block.

Scars conceived
in the midst of cocaine confessions,
vibrant verbal intercourse,
an effortless escape from reality
while engrossed in his scent.

Long before her body would be formally introduced
to the frigid steel table, she had undergone an autopsy
performed by the only forensic scientist
to reach her insides without having to slice skin.

Step one: removing each article of clothing
with careful precision and impeccable timing.
Bare hands free of tonsils, instead fingers that read
the landscape of her body, that before his touch
had been territory void of paradise.
She had discovered the power of sex
underneath his weight and the sprinkle of his sweat.

Step two: he penetrated her brain,
sleeping under layers of her womanhood,
as he finished sentences she would never
have the courage to complete.

His successful autopsy was completed at the taking
of the impermeable pieces of her heart.
Strategically he had swam through
the main aorta vein into the center of her being.
Once inside his coronary prison he attacked her
with midnight lullabies, and hip-hop fantasies
of their tight rhymes over a hot beat connection.

White chalk outlines the black-haired Latina,
as she lies there like a DaVinci sketch.
No less beautiful than she had been hours before
when her heart played the conga drums,
and her flesh was warm and rosy
like Mami's kidney beans.

Body bags ziplock her into the abyss,
tears are shed and prayers whispered.
No one savvy enough to notice,
no crime of passion has been committed.
This woman was not murdered.
Unafraid to be loved,
she alone unbuttoned her blouse
with her own unpolished fingers,
closed her eyes, and embraced
her bullet hole bliss.

IV.

Beautiful Mentiroso

85 Miles Per Hour

We speak of living in the moment. We speak of kissing till our lips fall off grow legs and walk to talk about this affair. We taste wine religiously as if it really is the blood of Christ. We hug like meth addicts on fire. We sex like the world will end. In sweaty desperation, mangled limbs, sore openings we fuse as if the planet will be struck by a massive meteor, wiping out all life as we know it. You burn holes into my pupils, you call this eye contact. You make my skin blue and bumpy, you call this passion. You consume all of me and I sit high off your sweetness like a diabetic. You call this love and I call this anything but good for me. I take the clocks I own and smash them into pieces, shatter mirrors, and forget what month we're in. When this artificial forever ends; right before the air bags inflate, right before I go crashing through the windshield, right before my heart stops beating and my mouth goes dry, before my eyes make eye contact with your blinking eyes through the rearview mirror, I, like the blind side of my car, refuse to see that black metal coming at me 85 miles per hour.

Triangle

I
wanted
to take this love,
this low-income passion,
this never ending urge to feel
your weight on top of my weight,
and fold it carefully into an origami canary.
I would place the winged paper creature in an
empty birdcage, and give it flight on the nights you
held her heated liquids tight in your cupped palms instead of
measuring the intervals between my orgasms. I pray that this paper
canary flies in through her window, lands on your shoulder, and sings you
a song that would convince you to return to me. You never fulfilled my beautiful
demands. Instead you, her, and I live in constant motion from the pulsating
between our legs, we live in constant denial as we try to convince ourselves that a
man could equally distribute his sex, his moments, and his body heat among two
needy women. It is denial that keeps us from tripping over the common sense to
leave this arrangement exactly where it belongs: in movies and soap operas. I am
sick of comparing my tits to hers, tasting peach lip gloss when I wear strawberry,
and tired of waiting for a new shape to take form. So I'm breaking the triangle
and
taking
my
paper
canary
with me.

The Break-up

She pops the bobbi pins out of her hair granting her tubi
free reign to unravel as she wipes the black eyeliner

that after the tears left oily puddles underneath her eyes.
She wanted to clean herself up for the last conversation

of their relationship. She wanted to look dignified
despite the hollow holes in her, despite knowing since

the first day he kissed her under the weeping willow
that she would end up being just another ex-girlfriend.

She had rehearsed her speech, practiced silencing her pumping
organ that beat so loud it reminded her of a construction demolition.

He avoids eye contact and hands her a box wrapped in metallic
green paper. She takes the box and wonders if he has changed

his mind and suddenly remembered that for that last two years
he loved her as she did him. She tears the paper open like the investigators

who broke the Watergate scandal. It's a yellow dildo with bulging veins.
He smiles and says, "It's a goodbye present. So you won't miss me."

Manhattan

Whoever invented loneliness never imagined how addictive it would be to sleep over your ribcage while tucking my hands into the folds of your armpits. I didn't want to submit myself unto yourself, but I also never planned on you being the best fuck I ever had. Yes, with the lights on. Or that after cold pizza and flat soda your lips embodied unplucked desire. So even though I try so hard to be thought of as the strong independent woman who can think like a man and act like a lady, you have put those plans into a serious head lock. I didn't know you were a Columbian luchador who fingered through my womanly fragments and hung them like ornaments on your own personal Christmas tree. It was January, I had no chance in resisting arrest, when you threw the handcuffs on me and chained me to your bed like princess Leia from Star Wars. We were an encounter that left us sitting on cold polished wood arranging an assemblage of nickels to resemble the twin towers, our own naked memorial. These are the things we do when no one is looking. You taught me without chalk, without a black board, that sometimes intimacy blooms through corruption. Dating in New York City inspires resentment after kissing a few dirty pigeons, slipping on divorced metro-cards, and almost a having a limb severed by metallic sliding doors indifferent to our everyday human encounters. Maybe after our acts of love, I can bloom into a human being again. A person capable of believing in the opposite sex, in the splendor of letting go and in the idea of allowing a man deep inside my calloused perception of the universe I call Manhattan.

Saturday Stuff

Foggy Fridays give way to the celebration
of your cologne. Not when its been freshly
sprayed, but when it mixes with your sweat.
You are a scented rainbow of possibilities.

I'll write you a thousand poems, hold
my breath for ten thousand seconds, feel
your hands multiply to the millions at the simple
meeting of your wide finger on my collar bone.

In the morning, when my eyes are first born
and I can barely make out shapes and colors,
I catch glimpses of your not exactly wet towel
and plea she loosens her grip without you noticing.

It's the morning you that I want to internalize
before you throw on your long johns and slip
into the day. Before my touch becomes a dried
up peach and my sex a distant entity.

The taxi drives away as all that is the earth between
you and I grows to giant proportions leaving me
dangling from the warmth of your breath.
I see the Friday people in their early rush gripping

paper cups of coffee as they estimate the agendas
of their days. I don't think of work or errands
or what must be done. Instead I dream of the
stuff that Saturday mornings suggest.

This is not a weekday kind of love.

The Kodak

The Kodak is techni-colored,
 with fuzzy pixilation and sienna dyed smiles.
 Taken before flat screens, digital cameras, and high definition distortions,
 before the love child, a separation, and a court appointed deportation.

The Kodak smells like 1984 and brick city palm trees.
 I was 3 years old, your first born baby girl. I'm wearing a fluffy white dress,
 despite the buzz cut, I was your doll.

Mami wanted a boy,
 so you both found ways to compromise.

In the Kodak my lips are closed, like two bodies laying on top of each other
 in pink distress. Silence. I don't own many words yet,
 but of the few I've stolen one of them belongs to you. "Papi."

My eyes are large and round, super saturated like cumulus clouds
 that hang low on my face ready to rain steady
 and wash away dead skin cells that dare to betray me.

You are holding me tight. Tight like a beam of light,
 tight like winter coat stitching, tight like an army of ants in formation.

In the Kodak your hair is an ocean of black dolphins,
 silver lighting hasn't struck, plucked,
 revealed the prank of whiskey and mortality.
 You are young like the insects that crawl into new skin.

Skin that has color like the inside of a plum.
 You are warm like the streams in the Dominican Republic,
 your teeth are shiny with coconut juice, and your mustache is a facial border.
 Southern treks reveal your smile.

In the Kodak you wear a tan colored members only jacket but no wedding ring.
 Your eyes are wide and round like mine, they snitch on you, turn you into the feds,
 with a written confession in black and white. "I love you hija, please forgive me."

In the Kodak there is hope in your eyes. You hope to be a good father. You hope to make
 it to all my birthdays. You hope to scare away all the boys who have tattoos and blistered
 self esteem. You hope that one day I become a doctor that can juggle life on her
 fingertips and swallow dictionaries. You hope that you can keep me from emotional fires,
 self medicating, and living ghosts. You hope that I will marry a man better than you.

And so do I.

Bolero

The year is 1972, y quien eres tu?
 Respond girl when a question is asked of you.
 So you smile fanning yourself con un periodico de ayer,
 Disfrutando un verano en Nueva York.
 The summer was always your favorite season,
 when the city cooked Nuyoricans
 sunny side up like eggs
 with legs on crowded sidewalks.
 No room to dance so you watusi
 your way up and down Lexington Avenue.
 Asking the streets, "Oye Como Va?"

"Hello Senorita, how are you?"

Que lindo mi barrio, smells like a mix of palm trees
 and marijuana. Plantains and asphalt.
 Oye nina, don't cry, it wasn't your fault,
 but the lagrimas keep forming
 like pearls escaping from pencil lined eyes,
 leaving salt crystals on your lips.
 Now part those lips and breathe in the seconds,
 But remember to release them just as fast.
 You know time is not meant for consumption.
 Todo tiene su final.

The year is 1972, who's gonna love you?
 Nadie como yo. Canta la Lupe.
 Sing it while Tito Puente carefully orchestrates.
 And you, alone sitting there. Privately masturbate.
 You know all the lyrics, they were written for you.
 Words spell out in smoke, this is your living
 room, polyester pillows, tan tiled floors,
 60 watt light bulbs, your favorite bottle of rum,
 two shot glasses, y una foto. Suvelo.

Turn up the music, Tirana.
 Let the vinyl spin. Sip your Palo Viejo,
 Let it heal you, transform you
 As you travel into the ayer
 when he made you orgasm mujer,
 spill your insides unto his hands,
 taste this man. It's liquidlife. Escandalo
 Pidele perdon.
 Maybe one day he will forgive you. If not
 You will always have this bolero.

Beautiful Mentirosa

If I told you...

A love layered in lies became our trademark, but I was still your beautiful liar who had mastered the art of tracing the letters M and B on your wrist tattoo.

If I told you...

You walked me through the forty deuce, a neon lit maze, as if you built Times Square yourself, setting the stage. You weren't just the president you were a client too.

If I told you...

I knew. Almost enough to grab a pair of scissors and chop off locks that hissed ugly secrets as we listened to your favorite salsa "La Cura" by Frankie Ruiz.

If I told you...

Too late to fall back into normality and walk the straight line, I would touch your face carefully, delicately, like the blind reading Braille

If I told you

Yo no tengo la cura para esa locura. But I love the bright lights of the big city. So I smile, blinking feverishly when your swag splashed unto my eyelashes despite the warnings from mami, "Ay miya ten cuidao".

If I told you...

Careful was not in my vocabulary as I fell victim to your romantic graffiti gestures, became the Bonnie to your Clyde, and even floated like a mermaid in the Coney Island waters.

If I told you...

I was the mariposa...The butterfly who landed on your shoulder long enough for you to memorize the pattern on my wing.

If I told you...

You were my atmosphere. My stratosphere. Polluted, but still I took a deep breath. Inhaled without the possibility of exhaling.

If I told you...

I was the poem you never had the courage to write. A breathing poem who introduced you to the written rhythms of Pablo Neruda and Willie Perdomo as you promised to love me more than you'd love me less.

If I told you...

Long after the fading funds, sleepless Harlem nights, and roof hopping transactions, that Papi Peso now Papi Preso was still my hero with or without the handcuffs.

If I told you

the missing ingredient in the sopa of your life was not me but simply believing as I the organ donor placed my beating bomb in the palms of you the heart recipient.

If I told you

The woman in me was born the day we met
and all that happened before you doesn't mean a thing
Would you believe me?

Quantum Physics

“You’re perfect” he said in his melodic say-so
as he caught a glimpse of my home girl lay-low.
Too tight skinny jeans that
made him want to release my thighs...
go deaf with my sighs.
I smiled without smiling
at his anything but gentle approach
Damn why did I turn back?
Pink heat flushed my face
as the sticky syllables slipped
landing faultlessly on my frigid palms
I took and tucked the seven numbers
under regretful bed sheets
and slept over them
without letting the four and nine poke me.
Ringing then stinging my senses
I came to be senseless
bravely baring my breasts
before he even knew my name.
I traced the scar across his back
with my love deprived fingers
asking about its origins.
Who split your chocolate skin in half?
Who sewed you back together?
I wanted to know the war story,
be the soldier who told it best.
Cold November nights convince us
to be cool under covers that fail
to cover one another from each other.
Paralyzed, I plead with my knees
to straighten themselves up
long enough for me to throw
my bra and panties on while I still can.
Run Chick!
Instead we wine and unwind,
drank the Sweet Bitch,
blinked till we realized
this moment was life.
Silently he slithered his way

in and about me
just as a garden snake
Slides through the tall green grass
without disturbing a single blade.
Feline fur frustrates my lungs
faster than I can catch my breath.
So I won't and I don't dare to
exhale in fear of interrupting this fairytale...
Swallowing words that belong to me
I read the silence like sign language.
Feeling concrete expressions give way
to new moods via smiles
I wasn't supposed to see.
Even prison can't imprison a reaction
to my Aphrodite charm bomb
Instead he dodges my bullet hole bliss
Stays far from the quantum physics
Of the deeper me
He was a floater wet with the surface
of my skin and sex...
Drifting on sweat
left on his sheets
And hovering over the aftertaste of my juices
That held his tongue hostage...
Touching his untouchable face
I let my lips play hopscotch
over his Butterscotch freckles,
surf over the waves in his hair,
but my favorite, to inhale his scent
once the cologne wears off.
There is no plan to be seen,
No obscene sex scene,
or tales of a Dominican Beauty Queen
who wore her sash till the letters fell off.
I was not a Harlem Hell fighter
looking to start a fire,
and giggle when red flames lick my face.
I was the product of misplaced desire
grinning and sinning
because tomorrow
I'll regret writing this poem.