



Empty Spaces

by Brenda Cárdenas

She is a switchblade afraid of the hint in a two-second glint that might spring you an arm's length away. *I fear*. She kisses close, to shut the open gate of hunger, heavy-footed as history perched on her chest. *Empty spaces*. She never rests. Stumbling through the clutter of language, she rummages cramped closets for her lost sounds—i griegas y erres—tumbling like marbles spilled in the attic. *Spaces I fear*. She main lines white noise—a guest persistent as rain flooding her muted room. *Spaces*. She adds another hue to the walls crawling with orange and blue that zigzag the curves of her world to the ceiling. *I fear empty spaces*. She is reeling in a ravenous subjunctive that would doubt its own bones were it not for her grip slipping from your moist shoulders to the winter of metal bedposts. *Spaces I empty*. She grinds against you minding only the bland blue sky that filters through the O'Keefe hollow of her pelvis. *I empty fear*. In this abyss, she comes, braying the silence away.

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Calculations

by Brenda Cárdenas

"I don't know what to tell you.
Your daughter doesn't understand
math. Numbers trouble her, leave
her stuck on ground zero."

*Y fueron los mayas
quienes imaginaron el cero,
un signo para nada, para todo,
en sus gran calculaciones.*

Is zero the velvet swoop into dream,
the loop into plumes of our breath?

"I suggest you encourage languages.
Already she knows a little Spanish,
and *you* can teach her more of that.
She lives for story time."

In the beginning there was nothing.
Then the green of quetzal wings.

*Las historias siguen cambiando,
sus verdades vigorizadas
con cada narración
como $X \times X = X^2$*

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Abuelo y sus cuentos: Origin of the Bird-Beak Mole

by Brenda Cárdenas

Abuelito, what's that on your arm?

¿Este? This little bump?

Sí, ¿qué es?

Pues, oye, un día cuando era joven
estaba trabajando en un jardín bellissimo
cuando lo and behold a little bird
swooped down and stuck his,
how do you say?

His beak.

Sí, his beak in my arm,
and I twisted and I twisted
en círculos, around and around,
until his beak broke off
right in my muscle. Y ya, mira,
tengo su nariz en el brazo.

But abuelito, what happened to the bird?

Pues, está en México.

In México?

Sí, niña, the bird stayed
montañas con sus amigos
jactándose de su herida de combate.

en las

But grandpa, how can he talk?
How will he even live without a beak?

Oh, you know, you lose a little here,
a little there. He will learn.

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Someone

by Brenda Cárdenas

(after a photograph in the George W. Brown, Jr., Ojibwe Museum and Cultural Center,
Lac du Flambeau Reservation, Wisconsin)

I

Someone Traveling
Sound Of Eating
High In The Sky

Traveling Sound
Of The High Sky
In Someone Eating

Eating The Sound
In Sky Travel
Of Someone High

Traveling In The Sky
Eating Someone
Of High Sound

Some Sound
In The Sky Eating
One Traveling High

Sounding Sky High
Eating Of The One
In Some Travel

In Sound Sky
Of Some High One Eating
Traveling

Sounding High Of Travel
So me Eating
In The One Sky

Someone Traveling
Sound Of Eating
High In The Sky

Someone

II

Between Someone Traveling
and young High In The Sky
stands Sound Of Eating

Leader, he
provides for

Someone

III
Someone Traveling
knows the camera
aims to capture
one tribe

draw you closer
to note similar details
in the regalia—
canoe shape
of their moccasins
order of
bead bead bead bead
bone bead bead
claw bead bead bone
bead bead bead bead
tooth

Knows you will see
the same stare
from the same eyes
that feel the same way
about you

IV
I have no idea
what Someone Traveling knows
or doesn't know
no idea
which maps he carries
in his mind his heart his pocket

V
For all we know
there is no bond—
not in the journey
not in the meal
not even
under the sky

Different ages heights
different ranks tastes moods eyes
different cheekbones
For all we know
these are three
separate

someones

VI

If this were not 1895, but 1965
the camera an Instant Polaroid
perhaps High In The Sky
would tie their portrait
to a helium balloon
and send all three of them
to the clouds
where they would bleed
together
into the moist, white puffs
and spill
like iridescent gills
of rainbow trout
or like muddied waters
sprayed about by the wind

or like a people

or like someone traveling

VII

The photographer
has no musket
no spices
no game

like the poet
no glass beads
no pelts
no land

no fishing rights
no new motorboat
no casino
no gasoline
nothing
in upturned hands.

no canoe
no full bingo card
no first treaty torn and taped
no reservation
to trade

For this
High In The Sky
doesn't give a damn
For this
he will give the camera
his most defiant, most blissful

from Sound Waves
Duración—V

by Brenda Cárdenas

Aquí vuelan aves arracimadas como uvas

Clusters perch over
open-mouthed stones,
the sculpted men arcing back,
necks straining toward gods and vines,
elbows raised in angles.
Birds veil the starved sun.

Aquí vuelan aves arracimadas

This is the V in Cabeza de Vaca
sweating the salt of the bay
in a migration that halts and hovers.
Is it the glint of obsidian that lures
vultures to the eye of earth?
Or jade of stone beasts that pull
thieves up the open-legged vertices
of our pyramids? We vanish

Aquí vuelan aves

in the wind-worn skull of the long-
horn, in mutations making bowls
of eye sockets, cups of its keratin.
We carve hilts for our bowies
from the open jaw. We feed.
Muscle is a buzzard's feast,
our brazos his power to swarm.

Aquí

The new sounds echo.
Our *v's* fling their arms open
and come back to us. *B's*.
We have seen balas
faster than veins of light
etching the night sky.

They fill our heads with ringing.

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Intensidad—Ñ

by Brenda Cárdenas

El campesino rolls
his shoulder blades as he turns
from the furrows toward
the road's curve home,
Otro año, otro día, otra estación;
el ha añejado con su añojal.

~Ñ, the yawn in mañana~

La araña weaves her web of music,
tuning its strings while she sings
de sus compañeras obrando
en las cabañas, labrando
en los campos de caña.
She holds the high notes,
pulling filaments taut.
And when a fly's wing
touches one fiber,
everything vibrates.

~la añagaza del balance~

A cat's arch and curled spine
stretches into the long afternoon.
Sueña con alimañas
espiondo de las montañas;
sueña con carne,
the wiry tension
of spring and pounce
on the small-boned
and the broken-winged.

~the sneer of engaño~

Deep heat of day rises
like a serpent from its cool tomb
entrañado beneath the sand,
leaves its tilde trace, la señal,
that loosens and fades,
one moment sliding
into centuries of terrain.

~el diseño antiguo del futuro~

Diamond-skinned Kukulcán,
guiñando desde el cielo,
slides past clouds over the edge
of sun at the tip of Chichén
onto a shadow of stone,
the equinox of a plumed past.

~the slow and brilliant tilt de los añosos~

Coiled in mantillas pañosas
y los llantos oscuros de añoranza,
the fire-eater waits for night
to define the sharp outlines
of his sustenance—la flama
debajo de su ceño
como una piñata abriendo
en una cascada de luz,
su señorada callando los gañidos
desesperados de niños—
eyes squeezed tight
above the blackened rim
of his open mouth.

*~Ñ, the grimace of resistance,
un puño contra la saña del hambre~*

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Poema para los tin-tun-teros

by Brenda Cárdenas

Este para los timbaleros, los bateristas, los tin-tun-teros,
los que tocan con cucharas en sus estufas
con lápices en sus escritorios
con uñas y nudillos en mesas, muebles, sus propias cabezas
con puños contra paredes
y dedos en las espinas y curvas de sus amantes, danzantes.

Este para los congueros, los tamboristas, los bongoseros,
los que nunca descansan
con sus tacones siempre golpeando la piel del piso,
zapateando en sus sueños llenos de maracas, güiros y claves,
estos bailadores con pasos tan suaves
y caderas que se mueven como sus *high hats* y tarolas.

Este para los timbaleros, los bateristas, los tin-tun-teros.
Son chingones con sus tormentas de platillos,
sus juegos de palillos que vuelan como alas. Qué malas
sus trampas que no nos permiten trabajar ni dormir,
solamente bailar y cantar, cantar y bailar
y a veces mover la tierra un poquito.

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