

Poems

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Ghetto Teachers' Apology

I'm afraid, sweet Wilmarie, we've lied.
We didn't teach you how to hide
your Rite Aid salary from welfare
in a Dominican bank. We didn't tell you
how to find a roommate or put a lock
on your bedroom door or how to walk
four blocks after sundown by yourself.
We didn't tell you what to say or how to dress
at your brother's funeral, patched bullet holes
in an open casket in your living room.
We never told you, like your boss, you can't speak English,
or like your cousin, you can't speak Spanish.
We didn't tell you how to live on \$5.50 an hour
or that you'd be an orphan at 18.
We didn't want to sour our hopes and fictions
and we wanted you to prove us wrong.
Sweet Wilmarie, we apologize.
We weren't strong enough to live
between crack houses and crackdowns.
We're not like you; we didn't know how to survive
behind shatterproof glass with those pretty brown eyes.

Festival Cervantino

—*Guanajuato, Mexico*

The woman in her bathrobe rented us
mochileras what was left in Guanajuato:
a thin couch for two thrifty backpackers where,
behind a membrane of curtain, lay her father.

*Pay no attention to him, she said,
and left us his calls for help: ¡Ayúdame! ¡Socorro!*
over our young, women's bodies.

I smelled olive oil in cast-iron pans,
centuries of eggs and death in this tiny house
where nothing was private, even the almost-
corpse, within feet from our bed.

I imagined him without limbs, without hair,
mangled, a half-eaten foot to the other side. We did not
bring him water. My friend and I paid our few pesos,

climbed into the town's clouds to watch
a mime troupe imitate death, and then returned
to him, his daughter and granddaughter
behind their own thin curtains.

They slept through his calls. We clung to one another
like sisters, like lovers. There was nowhere else to go.
Death sold like sweets in the street; a river casket of weeds.

Death and his upturned hat danced in the plaza,
balanced a ball on his nose for change.
We ate stale breakfast bread, bought candied skeletons.
We never even saw his face, his sugary eyes.

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To Macchu Picchu

—Pray before you leave in the morning,
look for the Mama Stone that can nourish you
—Lara Gularte

Boulders buttress terraced fields of potatoes,
water flows over stone troughs,
washes wide or narrow, hugging

or leaping away from the wall. Each
waterfall a chime of a different pitch—the hill
echoes a *quena*'s¹ graduated tones.

The guide says a *roca madre* has four sides,
one etched with a line pointing south,
another in shade cast by the longest day of sun.

This granite mountain, an erect thumb,
one of four—an energy circuit on the Solstice.