

Parting

There was a time
I had no word for *darkness*,
and so, I said, *darkness*.

I had no word to say *devotion*,
and so, I said, *Two sons*
grieving one mother.

A time came when our parents
sat under a tree
and sobbed for us, their sons

on their way
to a new country.

When I try to return to my boyhood,
sometimes I end up, a grown man,
with my head
on my mother's lap.

Loneliness

As a boy, I would climb trees,
reach into nests birds

would leave unattended.
I would fill my hand

with small eggs, and often
one or two hatchlings

would stare at me
from behind the sprigs.

There were times I wanted
to take them home,

keep them as my own,
raise them, imagined their beaks

one day opening
to call me, “Father.”

Love of My Life

Tonight, you are not my lover
Tonight, I am not your husband

How hard can it be
to enter my bed as my mother

I am a new born, feed me
I am the abandoned lamb
The weak hatchling

The branch broken in two
to beat a spoiled child

I am all memory

Be a mother and coo me to sleep
Baby-talk into my heart's ear
Run your hand over my head

You, milk
at the corner of my mouth

Strong Bond

Sometimes, weeks go by, and I don't call my mother. Sometimes a month goes by and a sign on the side of the road reminds me to call her. Sometimes the surface of my mind forgets she lives, that she still exists in this world.

My siblings probably think of me as heartless, un ingrato, an ingrate. But when my mother came to this country, I was already a man. I didn't need her as much as my younger brothers needed her. They still visit her, call her, make her feel loved.

If my mother were a country, she would be the one I leave behind in search of a better life.

Self-Portrait with My Father's Eyes

What sum of those who've died still remains with us? What percentage of our memory still belongs to them? When we see our shadow rising against a wall as we walk down a street, does it belong to us? Or is it the way a loved one who has died attempts to say, *I am here*.

Once, I painted a portrait of my father, face made of lines, and within the lines, I could see what I thought had always belonged to me: his eyes, and the way they looked at me, the way *he* looked at me, like a stranger looks at someone he loves.

The Poetics of Separation: A Micro-Essay

Poetry remembers that distance can be made of suffering.

Distance between blood cells.

Between two words on this page.

Between a mother and a son.

And so, I carry my past like a bag full of dirt,
but I can't make words grow out of it
and write what I can't remember:

What is the Spanish word for *water*?

What is the Spanish word for *longing*?

What is the Spanish word for *failure*?

My relationship with language is absence,
one I can't shape with my hands.

Not like clay.

Or fire.

I try.

And for this trying, I rely on what my body thinks it knows.

I allow it to speak to that part of me for which I'll never have words.

This poem doesn't want to tell you a story that you can follow.

It wants to take you to a river, blindfold you,

lower you into its veins.