

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Erika Ayon: Three Poems

Erika Ayón · Thursday, August 16th, 2018

### Elegy for the Orange

I peeled you on hot summer days,  
let your skin fall on my lap.  
Through you I shed my own skin,  
shed myself for this new life in Los Angeles.  
Your juice became my childhood nectar.

In California, you flourished in all seasons.  
You were my light in the morning.  
At night, you glimmered in the distance,  
burned bright like a street lamp.

When I reached for you, I reached for the sun  
that shined down on us as we stood around you,  
waiting for the day to end, for the sun to set,  
so my skin could cool, my eyes could rest.

I hold you as Apá offered triangles of you  
spread out like a kaleidoscope on a plate.  
When I blinked my eyes, you shifted shapes  
in my head, my mind became dizzy.

You were my salvation. I exchanged you for  
currency. Dollar bills handed to a little girl whose  
hair curled at the ends, wore a pink headband,  
and woke up in the middle of the night, wondered  
where she was, forgot where she had come from.

Your fragrance followed me into schoolyards  
where kids laughed at me for being seen with you  
on the street corner. During lunch, I hid you  
in the dark corners of my lunch bag.

I know I won't be your last survivor.  
I see them every day at the entrance of the 110

Freeway, the man who holds you up  
like a barbell. The woman who slices you into

small squares, mixes you into a fruit medley.  
The couple that stands outside Jons Market,  
presses you, pours you into clear cups,  
turns your drops into dreams.

\*

## I Never Wanted

*-from the voice of Apá*

*Nunca quise* to take them out there  
to sell on the streets. To see my children  
grow up like this. Only one boy, six girls.  
To protect them from men's stares,  
men ready to snatch them away.

*Nunca quise* to stand here for hours,  
the sun beats down, unable to leave  
the fruit stand. After a while my body  
no longer fills itself with fruit,  
the nectar becomes forbidden.

*Nunca quise* to return to the car wash,  
my hands peel like moist paper from  
the harsh soap bubbles. My hands  
when I sleep are restless, they move  
in circles as if wiping windows.

*Nunca quise* to paint houses,  
my children look at me when I run out  
with the gun, think I have gone to shoot  
the guy that refused to pay. Their faces  
show fear. In the distance, a storm forms.

*Nunca quise* to work in the fields,  
my hands have a permanent red sheen  
from the strawberries. Men shiver in  
corners when the immigration police  
approach. I walk the streets of Fresno,  
lost, see a mirage of my children.

*Nunca quise* to go back. I would have  
gone insane to go back to a country  
that holds the memories of my past in  
its breath, and releases them in the night

in dreams that awaken the dead,  
summon the ghosts of my ancestors.

\*

## An Altar for My Father

One day, I will build an altar for you.  
I'll place shelled peanuts because they were your favorite.  
The stems of roses because you never liked the petals,  
but green you loved, the dirt you loved, earth you loved.  
I'll bottle it for you, this earth, pack some up from  
the places closest to you. First, I'll go to San Martín de  
Bolaños, Jalisco, where you were born, and fill my pockets  
with soil from the highest point where you used to take  
the livestock to graze the pasture, where you once fell off  
a tree, where your mother's grave is found. On the way  
back, somewhere between Mexico and the United States,  
I'll stomp my feet, let the dirt rise, catch the dust  
into mason jars. I'll drive to Fresno, where you  
worked as a farmworker, steal fistfuls of field.  
I'll stop at the race tracks, where you gambled, kneel  
down, run my fingers along the ground, gather some  
for luck. Last, I'll end up at home, where you died  
that August morning, as Amá and Yenni read Bible  
passages while you drifted; Corinthians 13, "Love is  
patient, love is kind." Psalm 23, "Through the valley  
of the shadow of death." I'll go outside, seize handfuls  
of land from where the cacti grow, where Amá buried  
the yellow canary, the dark pants, and white t-shirt  
you passed away in. I will bring all this back to you,  
to your altar. This will be my offering. The only way  
I know how to bring you peace. I'll add the dirt  
I have collected to the stems of roses, boxes  
with bits of grass, a jewelry box filled with rocks,  
and if possible a piece of blue sky.

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