

La anciana

trata con reverencia la alcachofa y la cebolla
pela lentamente cada mango
se pone perfume de rosa y deja que suene el teléfono
de la cocina para poder recordar
cómo a su madre le encantaban las violetas

en el sendero reconoce artemisia, salvia, lila californiana
se da el tiempo para contar
cuántos carriles del tren pasan

recita versos andrajosos de Yeats
y prepara su barco para navegar a Bizancio
recoge conchas cada vez que camina por la playa
sella la carta a su hija con un beso verdadero

la anciana elabora un lienzo
 con una puesta de sol roja y amarilla
 un cielo negro de estrellas tempraneras y luna llena
cuenta las estrellas
 las llama por sus nombres
las pinta una por una en la larga noche

The Gray-haired Woman

treats artichoke and onion with reverence
peels each mango slowly
dabs on rose perfume and lets the kitchen phone ring
so she can remember
how her mother loved violets

on the trail she recognizes
artemisia salvia ceanothus
takes time to count how many train cars pass

she recites tattered verses from Yeats
readies her ship to sail to Byzantium
gathers shells every time she walks on the beach
seals a letter to her daughter with a real kiss

the gray-haired woman works a canvas
 with a red and yellow sunset
 a black sky of early stars and a full moon
she counts all the stars
 calls them by name
paints them one by one late into the night



Pelican Moon, acrylic, 2014

Treasure Map

go through Istanbul
sleep in a Byzantine cistern
find the silk slipper
Grandmother treasured

telephone your first love
in San Angel
you don't remember that he's died
you speak with his daughter
about the wonders of the Internet

then to British Columbia
you wear your Frida Kahlo earrings
grab the Magritte umbrella you found
at Gaudi's park
your Picasso dove tee shirt

lay down in the first field
of daisies you come across
sleep five hours
arise at sunset

soon the moon
winks her eye
she doesn't tell you how
but with her light you find the little white path

Reverie of Thanks

Open sky, open thoughts
Thanksgiving comes gently this year
memories mist

 feasts and prayers
 laughs
 and gobble-gobble squabbles

family here
family gone
all the little children everywhere

The world comes into closer focus now
I value each moment, each chance
to forgive, to start again
 to dance and laugh out loud

I give thanks for
a circle of sunshine
that swells the earth's garden
for what we have shared
 what we share today



Aix-en-Provence Terrace, oil, 2003



Time is a Lottery, acrylic collage, 2010

Sauté, Bake, Burn

I cook the way I live
whatever
is in the pantry of my mind
goes in the pot
I love the taste
no matter how combined
cabbage is from Mother
bran muffins from Dad
onion, garlic, dill and rice bring back
a kitchen in Ankara
when I find Sonoma lavender
I bake a dream of childhood
If my Spanish tortilla flips right into
the pan we will return to Madrid
If not, we'll eat
brown bread and butter in Dublin

An orange tastes of reckless flowers and sun
Porridge is our potion for forever love

It all goes in
and, if dinner burns, we eat it
never waste
re-use every scorched word, each dried-out passion
saving them
for the letter I'm always writing you
and, yes, each drop left on the palette
gets smeared on the next blank canvas

Skipping

boys skip rocks along the shore
divine gifts
memories of you
to write

my pen skips over lined paper
to the summer
you taught me
 long hand

you and Dad
had me skip third grade
 when other kids learned
 cursive

I held the pencil the way you showed me
copied your perfect hand
stayed on the lines

in the evenings I skipped off
to the rock where
Jeannie and I hid
letters in secret code

days skip fast forward
I scribble
to bring you back

I have missed the roundness
 of m for mother
 the loop of g
 is gone

II

Para mis bisabuelos irlandeses

Ustedes han poblado todas las horas de mi vida,
mi padre nunca los dejó irse ni un momento,
se penetran en el ritmo de todos los días.
Los recuerdo más en las nohécitas
cuando salen una por una las estrellas.
Ustedes aparecen en cada canción que me cantaba
James, mi padre, con su bella voz de baritono,
que quisiera ser tenor.

Ustedes de Irlanda,
tierra verde de lagos, ríos y valles,
de mujeres de pecho blanco como perlas de nieve,
Ustedes que viven en senderos encantados donde
te roban el alma y te lo rompen en la mano
como hoja seca.
Irlanda de hombres valientes que se pierden por amor
y que parten dejando a la madre más amada
y a la novia más verdadera,
Irlanda de las despedidas,
país que fue un pedazo
del cielo que un día cayó,
y formó una isla de rocío, de neblina,
de lágrimas alegres,
de seres hechizados, de piedras,
de adioses perpetuos.

A Ustedes, Bisabuelos, no les doy las gracias
por su compañía,
ya que no conviene la formalidad entre familia,
si son más míos que la melodía
del heladero de la vecindad
o mis propios ojos en el espejo.

Y, aunque James me explicó su nombre y apellido
y pueblo de origen, prefiero nombrarlos
simplemente "Bisabuelos."

For My Irish Great-Grandparents

You have inhabited all my hours,
my father never let go of you for a moment.
you invade the rhythm of every day.
I remember you most in the evenings
when one by one the stars come out.
You appear in every song my father, James, sang
in his beautiful baritone that wanted to be a tenor.

You, from Ireland,
green land of lakes, rivers, and vales,
women with breasts white like snow pearls.
You who walk on enchanted paths
where your soul can be stolen
crushed like a leaf
in an invisible hand.
Ireland of brave men, lost for love,
who depart leaving behind the most beloved mother
and most beloved sweetheart.
Ireland of the farewells,
country that was once a piece of Heaven
but fell to earth one day to form
an island
of dew, of fog, of joyous tears,
bewitched beings, rocks,
perpetual good-byes.

Great-Grandparents, I do not thank you
for your company,
such formality is not for family.
Besides, you are mine more than the melody
of the neighborhood ice cream man
or my eyes in the mirror.

And, even though James explained your names
and place of birth, I prefer to call you simply
"Great-Grandparents."

Abrocho el collar de encaje de mi blusa,
miro el mar planeando mi fuga,
enciendo una vela para espantar
la melancolía heredada,
los siento presentes.

Mientras cuida la fogata de una turbera,
una joven cuenta la leyenda
del foco enamorado.
Es mi voz, Bisabuelos,
y narro sin titubear,
pero tiritito del frío isleño
y, para que no se me lleven los espíritus Banshee,
Ustedes me abren la puerta de su casa blanca.

I fasten the lace collar of my blouse,
look at the sea planning my escape,
light a candle to frighten away
inherited melancholy.
I sense you here.

While she tends a peat fire,
a young girl tells the legend
of the Silkie in love.
It is my voice, Great-Grandparents.
I tell the story without hesitation,
but shiver from the island cold.
So the Banshee do not take me,
you open the door to your white house.