BEAUTIFUL WALL
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Part One
A JUDGE ORDERS THE OPENING OF FEDERICO GARCÍA LORCA’S GRAVE

Leave the dead alone.
Federico is not with the other eighteen bodies that were dumped there.

Do not rewrite the myth.
Federico is not there because his poem about

the moon lifted him away long ago.
No poet leaves bones as clues to where they must go.

Do not open the earth.
Federico emerged long ago and hid among the black trees
to get away from the death song, the others slowly moving
to the sound of his footsteps, their bodies stripped of possessions,

though the murderers left a folded piece of paper in Federico’s pants.
Do not unfold it and read what they did not read because Federico

took the words off the bloody page and ran.
He is gone and will not greet the shovels because your law is not

for tracing the saint. It is for entombing the written word,
but you will discover that poetry is not buried down there.
Here is the hand in its shade of absolute and the study of grapes with bruises.

If the river took the body, how did it burn?

Here are constellations stained in the books, the sentence hidden from the truth, executions painted on the sun as if what is here must be understood.

If black hands reach for the sun, how do ashes mask the face of history?

Here is the measure of the body, the rain that drips on what has been done—a greater telling vague with tongues. If stepping into the void is a cut flower, how does war leave survivors?

Here is the healing hand on the throat, the good heart and its water spilled when things are finally understood.

If the poem takes the soul, how does sound embrace it?

If this is silence, how does the bird bend the tree?
When the old women approached the church, they knelt on the concrete, penance to their Lord about to be paid as they slowly moved toward the doors on their knees, one woman in tears, the other muttering in silence, each one granted something from the one they believed, paying back on their burning knees, their heads draped in scarves, summer dripping on the hot concrete as they awkwardly moved toward the doors, churchgoers stepping out of their way as they approached the arch, standing back because they did not have the same need, did not ask for what could never be granted as they stared at the two women approaching the entrance this way, each one pausing down there to make the sign of the cross, stopping as people around them dipped fingers in the dirty cups mounted on the wall, blessing themselves before getting out of the way, the silent women unable to reach the holder of holy water, refusing to stand up and insert their fingers as others did, their scorched knees keeping them in the entryway, people going around them as the two women let out moans and prayers, a small boy appearing out of the arriving crowd, pausing behind the kneeling women to tap the holy water with his small fingers, sprinkling drops on the backs of each kneeling woman, then crossing himself before his parents grabbed him and pushed
him into the cool darkness of the church.
GODS IN THE ATTIC

1.

Cardboard box in my grandfather’s house, old man starving his kids, my father shining shoes on street corners at the age of five, the old man dying thirty years ago, my rare visit allowed while others are gone, the stairs to the attic as dark as the reasons to keep away.

No movement from cobwebs, box I rip open to find art prints of Aztec gods, descriptions of each at the bottom reminding me I was taught pyramids are for destruction, not for getting to the other world. Someone saved these drawings to keep me climbing the stairs.

2. *Huehuecoyotl*

God of music flying over the flames of the mother, drum beating until his heart falls in a river of feathers, a light with black diamonds tossed to the warriors who impregnate their women—Huehuecoyotl releases the flowers because men born in this fertile period grow to be singers and storytellers,
Huehuecoyotl tossing colors as fragrant as the night, the priests claiming sons of the flower period would become overindulgent at the waterfall where the storyteller dove and was not seen again until someone wrote the truth.

Two-headed figure of a man and coyote—his power too alien for the text I have been writing for fifty years. When I set the print down, I hear a rustling in the corner, dim light destroying what floats in the air.

3. Ilamatecuhtli

Goddess of the earth, death, and the Milky Way greets me with her spread legs, though the sun breached her universe before I came along. She is an aged woman with fleshless mouth, large bared teeth and dressed in white. Ilamatecuhtli holds a shield and baton and I have seen this woman in white before, known her in the story of the river, why her temple was known as “darkness” when the locked ward of the mental hospital kept me for days, women in white wearing her
seashells to tease me into getting well, the room making me doodle drawings of faces while I waited.

Ilamatecuhtli appears in star skirt and the attic door closes, my trouble breathing making me set her down, the woman in white pointing to constellations Sagittarius and Auriga. I pick up the drawing and she brushes my face with the poem of healing.

4. Itzamna

God of writing wrinkled in the closet. Itzamna brings his screenfold book and drops it in my aching lap, his second role as a healer surprising me because I want to close the box and run away, my desire to fold the prints quickly passing and I open the roll to allow Itzamna to walk to his writing stone, symbols revealing the lizard—reptile I knew as a child, the white lizards of my recurring dream snowing on the picture of the writer kneeling over his stone.

5. Xochipilli

His vision is folding the sun into the secrets of my father’s family that never allowed me to know them, their silence clashing with Xochipilli, another patron of scribes, the last print of the codex he created made
of hundreds of my failed poems,
old paper thrown away, weak lines
I have laughed at, rejecting their
unconvincing shadows, a cycle
that demands I see what I should
have faced long ago, ceremonies
no one will ever witness because
Xochipilli traces a symbol that
is mine alone.

Movement downstairs, so I put
the prints away, push the box into
the corner, its torn lid falling over
newspapers that discolor the art
of hidden beliefs, though these
prints are for decoration and not
for those whose faith was
sacrificed at the altar long ago.
BARREL CACTUS

In the 1932 photo, my grandmother Julia and her sister pose in front of a huge barrel cactus, the round plant reaching their waists as they stand behind it and squint into the camera, the enormous barrel of water wider than the two women together, who will serve their husbands in the Arizona desert, have children, and be punished for drinking from the well.

Julia’s polka-dotted dress reaches the ground, while her sister’s white skirt and coat add to the white hat she wears, the light from it reflecting beyond the barrel covered with thorns that grow down the sides, barbs the women would love to wear if they found a way to open the giant barrel and decorate themselves with what naturally comes weeping from the earth.
LAST NIGHT

Last night, the bees came, the tops of the barrel cactus split open by the heat, bees darting into the night to find the place they belonged. I heard them in the canyon and waited inside the broken trunk of the cottonwood, hiding in there to learn how swarms of bees hum about the future in their sleep, so sweet desert soil remains and is no longer the honey that sticks to my lips, opening the dirt road until I find the slashed barrels and take a drink.

Last night, the bats followed their flight out of Carlsbad Caverns to feed on peyote plants that grow around the entrance, this well-documented myth broken when I reached the opening in the earth and saw the blue lights, headed back to my car because I approached the wrong cave, smelled the smoke, bats brushing my head with the smell of guano that made me leave without entering the ground.

Last night, a mountain lion wandered into the town and was trapped in a car wash, police shooting it, the streets marked with the claws of the old, my hands slapping walls and leaving a mark, a distant hum mistaken for light poles blinking across the city, the clay jars on my porch brimming with