

sus plumas el viento

(for my mother, Amalia)

by Gloria Anzaldúa*

Swollen feet
tripping on vines in the heat,
palms thick and green-knuckled,
sweat drying on top of old sweat.
She flicks her tongue over upper lip
where the salt stings her cracked mouth.
Stupid Pepita and her jokes and the men licking
her heels,
but only the field boss,
un *bolillo*, of course, having any.

Ayer entre las matas de maíz
she had stumbled upon them:
Pepita on her back
grimacing to the sky,
the anglo buzzing around her like a mosquito,
landing on her, digging in, sucking.
When Pepita came out of the irrigation ditch
some of the men spit on the ground.

She listens to Chula singing *corridos*
making up *los versos* as she
plants down the rows
hoes down the rows
picks down the rows
the chorus resounding for acres and acres
Everyone adding a line
the day crawls a little faster.

She pulls ahead
kicking *terremotes*,
el viento sur secándole el sudor
un ruido de alas humming songs in her head.
Que le de sus plumas el viento.



The sound of the hummingbird wings
in her ears, *pico de chuparrosas*.

She looks up into the sun's glare,
las chuparrosas de los jardines
¿en donde están de su mamagrande?
but all she sees is the obsidian wind
cut tassels of blood
from the hummingbird's throat.

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Drawing by Héctor Ponce de León.

She husks corn, hefts watermelons.
Bends all the way, digs out strawberries
half buried in the dirt.
Twelve hours later
roped knots cord her back.

*Sudor de sobacos chorriando,
limpia de hierba la siembra*
Claws clutching hoe, she tells the
two lead spatulas stirring the sand,
jump into it, *patas*, wallow *en el charco de mierda*,
breathe it in through the soles of your feet.
There was nothing else but surrender.
If she hadn't read all those books
she'd be singing up and down the rows
like the rest.

She stares at her hands
Manos hinchadas, quebradas,
thick and calloused like a man's,
the tracks on her left palm
different from those on the right.
Saca la lima y raspa el azadón
se va a mochar sus manos,
she wants to chop off her hands
cut off her feet
only Indians and *mayates*
have flat feet.

Burlap sack wet around her waist,
stained green from leaves and the smears of worms.
White heat no water no place to pee
the men staring at her ass.

Como una mula
she shifts 150 pounds of cotton onto her back.
It's either *las labores*
or feet soaking in cold puddles *en bodegas*

cutting washing weighing packaging
broccoli spears carrots cabbages in 12 hours 15
double shift the roar of machines inside her head.
She can always clean shit
out of white folks toilets—the Mexican maid.
You're respected if you can use your head
instead of your back, the women said.
Ay m'ijos, ojalá que hallen trabajo
in air-conditioned offices.

The hoe, she wants to cut off...
She folds wounded birds, her hands
into the nest, her armpits
looks up at the Texas sky.
Si el viento le diera sus plumas.

She vows to get out
of the numbing chill, the 110 degree heat.
If the wind would give her feathers for fingers
she would string words and images together.
Pero el viento sur le tiró su saliva
pa' 'trás en la cara.

She sees the obsidian wind
cut tassels of blood
from the hummingbird's throat.
As it falls
the hummingbird shadow
becomes the navel of the Earth.

bolillo— a derogatory term for Anglos, meaning hard crust of loaf of white bread
entre las matas de maíz—between the corn stalks
terremotes—sods
el viento sur secándole el sudor—the south wind drying her sweat
un ruido de alas—a sound of wings
las chuparrosas de los jardines ¿en donde están de su mamagran-de?—Where are the hummingbirds from her grandmother's garden?

sudor de sobacos chorriando, limpia de hierba la siembra—The sweat dripping from her armpits, she weeds the plants.
manos hinchadas, quebradas—swollen, broken hands
mayates—derogatory term for Blacks
como una mula—like a mule
Ay m'ijos ojalá que hallen trabajo—Oh! My children, I hope you find work
Si el viento le diera sus plumas—If the wind would give her its feathers.
Pero el viento le tiró su saliva pa' 'trás en la cara.—But the wind threw her spit back in her face.