



En estos tiempos

(poemario inédito)

Norma Elia Cantú Ramón*
Illustrations by Karen López Murillo**

In the Time of COVID

En la frontera as the crises looms as the deaths mount,
We mourn, we weep, we wallow in our despair once more.
No hay velorios, no hay entierros. All is quiet save the llanto abierto en el alma.

En el alma, the river leaves a trace of hope and an open wound
No longer healing, no longer cicatrizando heridas.
Ever flowing to the Gulf, ever reminding of death and hope, everlasting.

Everlasting, la pandemia nos une, nos divide, nos incita
A ser lo que jamás fuimos, lo que no imaginamos ser,
Criaturas que siguen abrazando el pasado, que lloran y sueñan con futuros dignos.

Dignos seres, we survive and keep to our traditions
Los matachines bailan el 3 de mayo and, we roll out our daily tortillas
Como si no hubiera mas que hacer, we toil, we ache, we pray.

Pray that this too shall pass, that all will be as it was, or better
Without racism, blatant and cold. Poverty will rule no longer.
All will be clothed, all hungers fed, as the pandemic waves come and go.

Go gently, we will not.

* Norma Elia is a Chicana/o and Latina/o cultural studies expert and author, she is also a Distinguished Professor of the Humanities at Trinity University.

** Karen is a visual artist; @karenjoy_.

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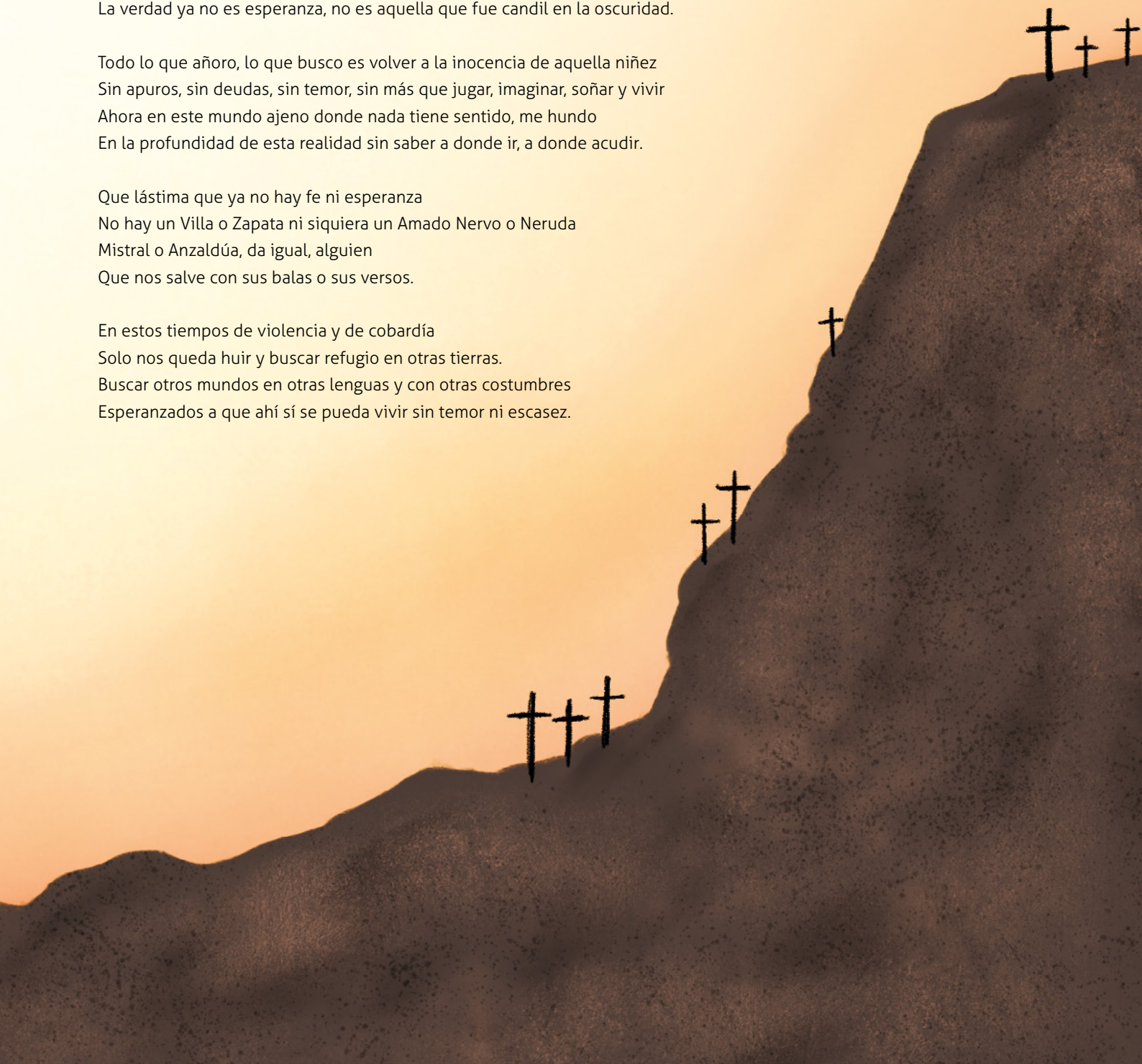
Hay tiempos de vacas flacas y tiempos de vacas gordas,
Decía el abuelo al responder a mis lamentos.
Para quienes así lo ven, jamás habrá justicia.
¡Es que no hay quien detenga La matanza!

La verdad arrasadora del pueblo subyugado que clama
Por ser libre, libre de la injusticia, de la opresión, del miedo,
Esa verdad que yace muda y sin oyente a sus gemidos silenciosos,
La verdad ya no es esperanza, no es aquella que fue candil en la oscuridad.

Todo lo que añoro, lo que busco es volver a la inocencia de aquella niñez
Sin apuros, sin deudas, sin temor, sin más que jugar, imaginar, soñar y vivir
Ahora en este mundo ajeno donde nada tiene sentido, me hundo
En la profundidad de esta realidad sin saber a donde ir, a donde acudir.

Que lástima que ya no hay fe ni esperanza
No hay un Villa o Zapata ni siquiera un Amado Nervo o Neruda
Mistral o Anzaldúa, da igual, alguien
Que nos salve con sus balas o sus versos.

En estos tiempos de violencia y de cobardía
Solo nos queda huir y buscar refugio en otras tierras.
Buscar otros mundos en otras lenguas y con otras costumbres
Esperanzados a que ahí sí se pueda vivir sin temor ni escasez.



Las Mujeres de ayer y de hoy

Es la puritita verdad que a las mujeres se les niega todo
Desde que nacen se les viste de color de rosa y las moldean a ser niñas
Buenas, calladitas, sin quejarse aunque les duela, y les calen los zapatos
Y si lloran portándose débiles y tristes, entonces les hacen caso:
Les dan un "tenmeaquí" o las entretienen con juegos y prendas vacías.
Y si se resisten, ¡que barbaridad! Son putas, o por lo menos sinvergüenzas
No tienen pelos en la lengua y se quedan para vestir santos.
¿Qué sería de este mundo si a ellas también
Tuvieran la libertad de ser, de amar, de vivir
¿Sin prejuicios y sin vergüenza de ser lo que son?

Encuentro

Hoy me encontré con La Llorona, allá por el río
Llevaba su traje de novia, el pelo largo y negro. Sin maquillaje parecía
Fantasma. Me sonrió, así que me sentí capaz de preguntarle algunas cosas
¿Cómo estás? Me contestó con voz dulce y áspera a la vez, como que el gritar constantemente
La hubiera dejado ronca.
Ya me cansé, me confesó. Esto de andar vagando y gritando ¡Ya chale!
Pues déjalo, le aconsejé.
No puedo, dijo con tristeza. No puedo dejar de asustar
A tantos hombres borrachos y jugadores que maltratan a sus mujeres y a sus niños.
No, no puedo.
Me dio lástima, la pobre Llorona. Es cierto, le confirmé. Todo sería peor
Sin tus espantos y apariciones, sin tus gritos. Me sonrió, y se fue, flotando sobre el río
Y al despedirse me estremecí de ver cómo se deslizaba y desaparecía
en la luz tan leve de esa hora mágica del anochecer.
El ocaso que tanto me gusta, y al alejarme del río, me pareció oír su gemido
¡Ay mis hijos!



Octavio Quintanilla*
Illustrations by Karen López Murillo**

At night, our neighbors dig graves

At night, our neighbors dig graves.
Think we don't see them,
but the picks and shovels jabbing the stone
wake us.

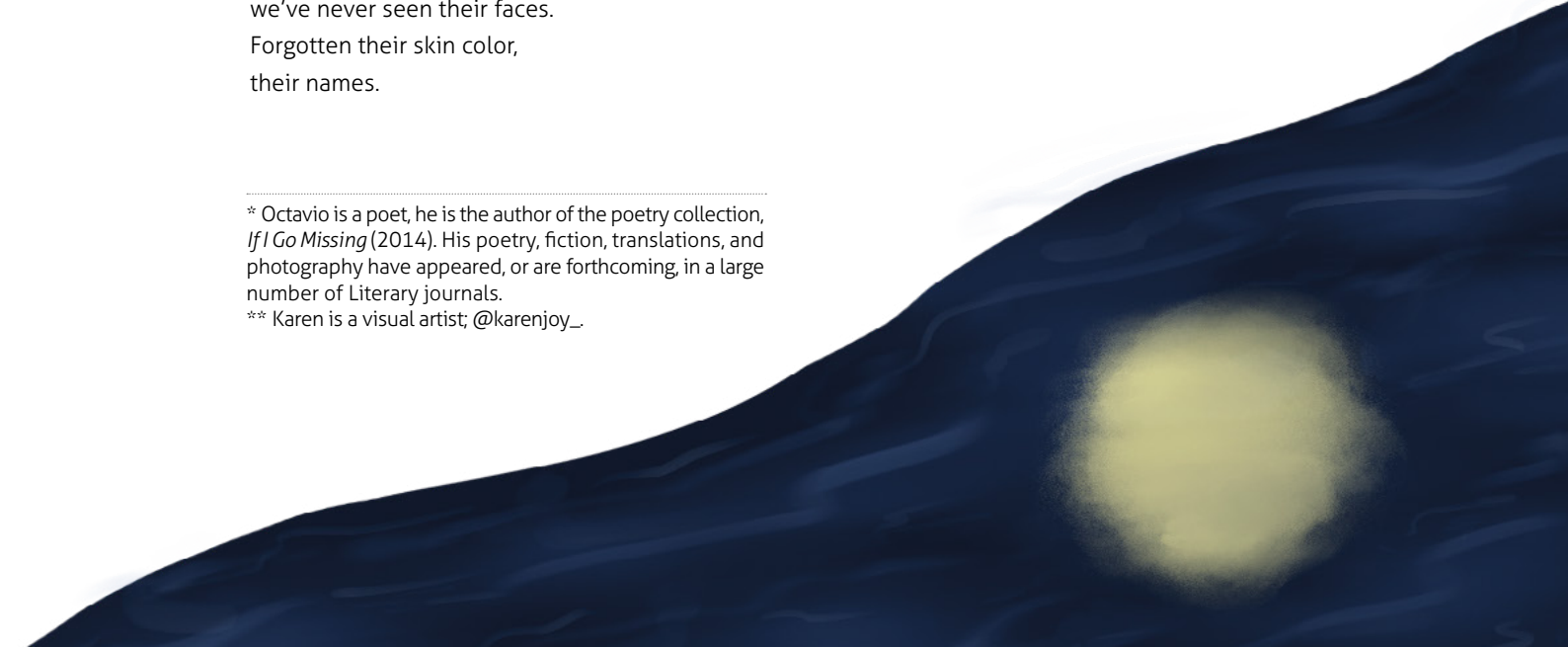
We think they want to bury themselves,
or their only living children.
We can only imagine.
Of our children we know so little.
We don't see them in the papers.
On television.
We don't hear them on the radio.
Some of us still look for them
on streets, the corners,
in the backseats of taxis,
on the patriotic flags.
Nada.
Street corners disappear.
The backseats of taxis, the flags—
flags with no country disappear.
The neighbors wake us with their howls.
And though their lamps open the darkness,
we've never seen their faces.
Forgotten their skin color,
their names.

Every morning we wake
caressing a pack of matches.
Sit at the bed's edge
looking for our reflections.

Want to be sure we're still here
and face the void in our eyes.
Discover the easiest way to burn
what is left.

* Octavio is a poet, he is the author of the poetry collection, *If I Go Missing* (2014). His poetry, fiction, translations, and photography have appeared, or are forthcoming, in a large number of Literary journals.

** Karen is a visual artist; @karenjoy_



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.



Elemental Waiting

I prayed to the empty parks,
I prayed to the sunlit roads,
I prayed to the childish God
of my childhood
to make a knife
out of my blessings.
I prayed the corpses
I carried in my heart
could be lifted and drowned
in the black fields
where lonely bulls grazed.

Listen, I'm writing what I can't remember
as if this sowing is all that matters, and it isn't.

No one is here to touch me, no one is here
to fill my center with sand.
What word to pack a wound?
What wound to fill a mouth?
The parks never answered my prayer.

God just clapped his hands
and sent rain to drip from the trees.

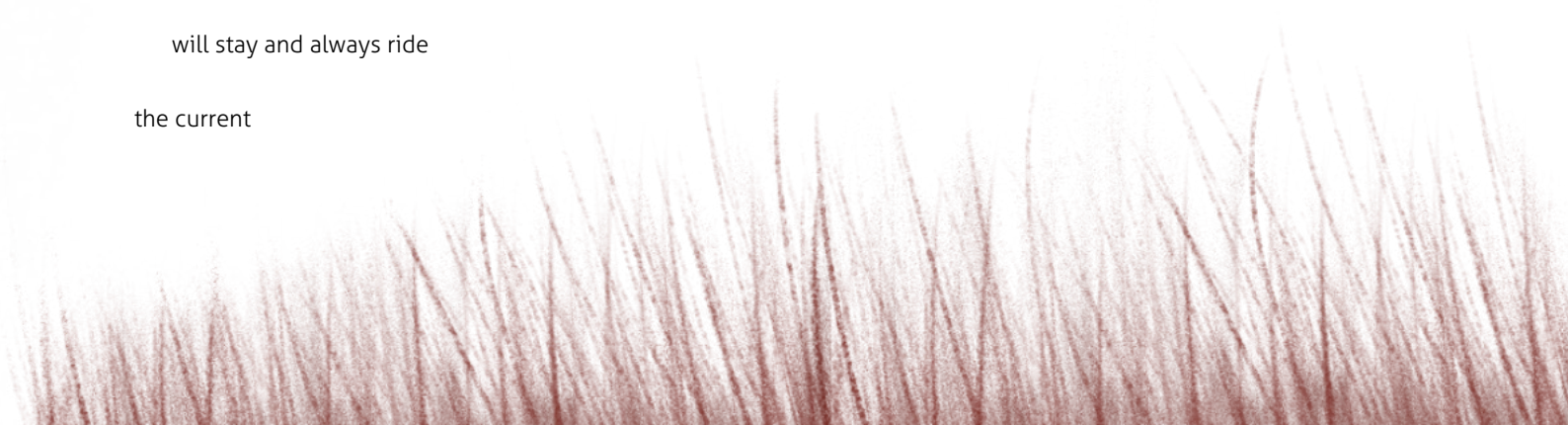


Poem for exiles

When you cross a river
you take something of it in your arms
but a part of you
will stay and always ride
the current

Poem in which the violence occurs back stage

I have no news.
I no longer believe what the meadows say.
The wheat fields are silent.
They quiet what they witnessed.
The wild bulls swallow their tongues
because they can no longer say, "justice."
Every morning I wake touching my face.
Want to feel it wet with light again.
Make sure they have not taken it.



Rossy Evelin Lima*
Illustrations by Karen López Murillo**

To Say Goodbye

If leaving requires a farewell, I will swallow the urge to tell my grandmother that I am a fruit from her tree. By the riverbank, I see my wet clothes and know they will become a refuge for vermin. But not my grandmother's dress. The red dress in the photograph I keep, clung to her waist, a lantern belly that was preparing to give life to my mother. The red dress, infused with her hair's swaying melody, worn out by the sea's relentless kiss.



II

There is no photo where we gaze at each other, as if she could keep me safe from the truths she carried while sitting on that rock, sweeping the sands of time. Each photograph is a backdrop of her retreat, her mestiza profile— a silent sentinel to the horizon, foreshadowing the journey I had yet to take, the halves of a life spent returning.

III

If my farewell demands an offering, I will search in that new land for my grandmother's dress. A piece, even just a piece, of the porous fabric that covered her. A piece, like the love of a sailor who continues to light a candle for her memory each year. I will search, as one seeks shelter from a storm, for her dress, her smile, the void she left in her children, the longing

to return to my land and belong once more. From her, I seek a garment as an offering. This path carved into my bones tells me I'm the flesh of her story, yet in my grasp lies only the quiet of her absence. To say farewell, I need my grandmother's dress, a blind map that will guide me toward the corridors of memory lost and my future.

* Rossy Evelin is a writer, academic, translator, and activist. She is the author of three poetry collections. Her work has been published in many Literary journals.

** Karen is a visual artist; @karenjoy_.

In the Shadow's Fold

In the darkness, no light dares to touch, the winds are thick enough to drown in, there is no voice —no flowers or altars to pray for what was lost. I am just a seed, tucked in a shadow's fold. They made me forget the warmth of maternal love. In place of eyes, I have two holes, deaf holes whose darkness fly, starving for the scent of cempaxúchitl. I crossed without you.



II

They clawed you away with filthy hands —five sharp talons, furrowing my identity, a tug, a sear, a howling burn. In its wake, a scar screamed red, repeating its verdict: the filth of stones put in place to separate our bodies.

III

There is no light, only water bearing the dead. You see me grounded, bare, gazing upon my dirt-streaked face, my hands in bare flesh from sifting through rocks —the vault holding the silenced stories of my people. You find me —in this country closed around me like a coffin.

IV

The most beautiful part of my body is the one I clean with flower offerings. Every shimmering version of myself has died. Now you see me, Venerated Mother, and instead of running into your arms, I ask you why you allowed it. My name has vanished from the sky where your constellation still burns. You see me like this and you run, Tonantzin, to hide, Tonantzin, to try to forget me, Tonantzin, and without looking back, the river hears you say —Oh, my poor child.