

3 POEMS

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FAMILIA DIVIDIDA

The Río Grande River between Paso Lajitas and Lajitas, 2015

Saraí rushes the water
like it's the Jordan,
amid the thronging surge
of weeping, laughing souls.

Doña Chata squints rheumy eyes,
skirts gathered to her knee.
She glimpses Saraí, notes
braids rimed with unexpected age,
the older
plunges headlong
heedless of muddy spray.

Madre e hija collide,
euphoric embrace
between here
and *allá*,
more than a decade of separation
dissolving into tears.

Repeating up and down
this stretch of the Río Grande—
two communities, two countries,
once weft and warp of love and tradition,
a vibrant fabric,
razor wires now partition:
hate and fear and politics.

For an hour,
watched through glinting scopes
from rumbling jeeps,
this divided family is whole

like a lost soul dipped
beneath redeeming waters
while a dove croons idyllic peace
upon a broken sunbeam.



LET ME BURY MY SON

Near Brownsville, 1915

On my knees I beg for the love of God:
Mister Lawman, let me bury my son.

They say he's a traitor, bandit, thief:
My boy was only working at his uncle's side.

We said nothing when your people took our land,
Bought up our ranches, pushed us south of town.

We cast our eyes aside, picked up spade and hoe
To work the soil where once our cattle grazed.

Don't strip this final dignity away, good sir:
Mister Lawman, let me bury my son.

All of you afraid of that plan
Hatched by rebels to cut you down as one

This isn't Mexico. We're *Tejanos*, faithful
To our state. We seek no revolution.

Federal troops and Rangers far outnumber
These brown-skinned, Spanish-tongued neighbors.

A train has been derailed, I know. Bandits
Bolted back across the Río Grande.

In rage the troops returned to find my son at work
With his uncle and others on one of your farms.

Those calloused hands, would they ever
Lift a rifle, ever curl around your neck?

My son's hands, even free of dirt, are not
White. Evidence enough for you. Each hanged—

A mother's grief at the loss of her son—
Bereft, I traveled to that tall, bleak mesquite

Wept to see my brother dead, howled to see my son.
Rangers laughed. They would not let me cut him down.

His limbs swelled tight against his clothes.
They would not let me cut him down.

The sun beat down and blacked his flesh.
They would not let me cut him down.

The flies like smoke then wreathed him dark.
They would not let me cut him down.

The vultures swarmed and pecked and tore.
They would not let me cut him down.

Still he sways from that noose, creaking in the wind.
There are rites we must perform—our God commands.

Think of all these spirits, curdling in shame,
Think of vengeance brewing slow in the sandy soil.

Show me that you're human. Even now there's time.
By everything that's holy: let me bury my son.

BORDERLAND SKY

endless, blue so hot it edges
toward white, pitiless,
indifferent to the flat coastal
plain, dots of grey-bottomed
and alluring wet harried by
the gulf's gusting breath—
meager, fleeting shadows
on the brown brush, the
turgid, wild river below.

or black, a sable cape slowly
bangled with glinting silver,
flung over the eyes of the
wide world to calm its
snorting rage, but ominous
and hinting at bleak endings,
raked at breath-taking
moments by the death
of blazing stars, tumbling.

behold its denizens, legends
in flight—the cruel *lechuzas*,
witches feathered by blackest night
snatching naughty children
from homey bosoms;
the Big Bird, its prehistoric
and craggy features snarling
like a crazed ape as it dips
its leathery wings our way;

la Llorona, drifting over
water, moaning for her
children, dragging
stragglers into the depths—
all the harpies, lost souls,
thunderbirds and legless
vampires of lore, criss-
crossing that vastness,
looking down at us.