

one-sided conversations with my mother

cemetery

amá, when you were alive, i never once spoke to you in english. now, ten years after your passing, i think there are things i would like to say that i've never learned how to say in spanish. for some conversations a dictionary is a doorway. for others it is an obstacle.

it's raining today
like it was the day you died. the way it rained in the weeks after. someone said it meant the sky was mourning with us, but i've always loved the rain. and so did you. you rested when it rained. no fighting the sun's heat. i imagine you could feel the hot earth sighing and all the green leaves singing.

your remains rest here. the earth is soft beneath my feet. the grass springs back when i have passed. i buried my braid here with you. you lay here alone, for nine years minus one day, before they laid his remains beside you. the ground above him seems fractured, unsettled.

i am not the girl i was
ten years ago, amá. what would we say now
about death, about dying, about life.

kitchen

this is the kitchen where you made us meals without number. i watched you so many times. the sink is slightly rounded, here, where we both leaned against it to wash dishes. this is the counter, with its speckled yellow orange and green starburst pattern, where you made tortillas, where i laid out cookies, where we all always gathered.

it's been six years since moisés stood
where you stood in this kitchen. washed chopped
scraped peeled seasoned stirred kneaded tasted where

you washed chopped scraped peeled seasoned stirred
kneaded tasted.

i wept. he woke the walls
the house the windows the floors. the air itself vibrated
and shimmered remembering you. this was my home
again. where you had been. i wept amidst the scent of
onions and tomatoes simmering.

i would like to tell you about his *atole*
de avena, the *arroz con leche*, his *carne guisada* made
without flour, the dish he invented with *nopalitos*. how
his cooking often made me want to cry. though he
hardly spent any time in the kitchen with you, somehow
he learned, like you, to infuse his cooking with love.

i never learned that. something always burns
when i try. maybe if you explained it, i would
understand.

so much i would like to
tell you about my brother, your youngest son, the last
gift you gave me.

garden

i remember you sneaking radishes as if they
were a guilty pleasure. cucumbers by the double
handful and fruit, always fruit. white grapes, red grapes,
apples, oranges, bananas. a pan of sautéed spinach to
ease your craving. *nopalitos* or green beans with a little
onion and *chile*. *pan de elote* made without any flour.

you grew up close to the *monte*,
eating the land's bounty. you grew up with a
garden. i remember you poring over packs of seeds at
the store. how you longed to grow your own corn and
tomatoes and squash. you'd worked in fields all your
life, harvesting the food of others. but i knew what you
wanted. a little plot of land where you could watch your
own food grow from seed to leaf-ling to fruit-bearing plant.

apá's hunger
ruled the food we ate. he grew up on fried potatoes,

refried beans, fried meat. he only allowed iceberg lettuce and tomatoes served at the table. i remember one summer we ate fried chicken until the thought of it made me want to vomit. i lived on biscuits and honey.

oh, the

conversations we could have now about growing food and pesticides and nutrition and the benefits of fiber and fresh produce and hormone-free meat and avoiding preservatives and the causes of cancer.

oh, the causes of cancer.

hospice

i will always be grateful for this place. the kind and graceful nurses. the blue serenity room. the separate gathering area. the small moments of care. the visiting harpist. the extra blankets. the couch where i slept. the blooming plants outside the patio door. the vases of fresh flowers volunteers brought.

they never said you had too many visitors. and visitors came at all hours. a lovely place for them to make their goodbyes. no cold and alien hospital. the staff left us mostly alone that last morning. to hold your hand as your breath slowed and everything but your body fell away.

we spent very little time speaking in your last days. you spent a lot of time sleeping, especially after they started the morphine drip. and then you couldn't speak at all.

so strange, you lying in silence.

when i lived at home after college, you never called or shook me awake. you simply sat at the edge of my bed and started talking. eventually, i'd respond. wake up. and our conversations of the day would begin.

i think we both chose our friends for their ability to make interesting conversation. we delighted in talking to strangers. people always said we looked alike

though our features were completely different. i
remember we were both so charmed when someone
said we had the same smile. do i resemble you more
now that i am older.

road

in my first memories of you, you are driving. dawn.
wind. the roar of the truck's engine. afternoon heat.
gritty dirt everywhere. dusk. a thousand miles of
highway unrolling before us.

in my last memories of you, i drove your body
three hundred miles to its resting place. i didn't speak to
you then. everything in me was silent and still.

so much we could say to
each other now. things i didn't know then. grief betrayal
pain illness. i would like to ask you about despair and
endurance. about the dimensions of the spirit. about
your memories. i want to hear you again telling me
every memory you shared and all the ones you didn't.

i'd have so much to tell
you about the last ten years. people i've met. things i've
done. who i am now.

i would like to share everything i've
learned about the indigenous identity you were never
ashamed of. i would read you poems, translating them
all. i would insist until you sang with me. i would have
so many questions.

you'd be seventy-one now if you'd lived. if
you'd left apa all those years ago, we could have been a
happy little household of three. just you, me, and
moises. the three of us taking care of each other.

we could have been happy,
even with the other siblings coming in and out of our
lives. i don't know if you would have been able to resist
taking apa in when he was sick, when he was dying.

i don't know.

your hair would be white now. it

had so little grey in it when the chemo and the radiation
took it all away. you would still have hardly any lines,
and no one would believe you were over seventy.

you and moisés
would have a garden. we'd repaint all the rooms in the
house. there would always be music. and laughing. we'd
all take forever to get up from the table after breakfast,
talking until our legs became restless. we'd take day
trips and road trips whenever we wanted, and drive as
slowly as we wanted. stopping whenever we wanted to
rest or take a look around. no hurrying. no leaving it till
next time.

waking

there is so much to say. so many stories to tell. your
absence lives in me.

there is no way to end this
conversation, amá. it has no end. it will never end...