

KENNETH CHACÓN

Varrío Gnosticism

This morning I rise to a chorus of gunfire,
each bullet's song shattering the silence
of the young morning, this gap that fills
the space between sweltering days.

I listen closely.

When the tune starts to die, I wait
for it to pick up again, for gunshots to ring
like thunder as if an orchestra of fallen angels
had been playing, trying to rip peace in half
as if it were a paper bag from the liquor store.

I listen for it,
but outside,
nothing.

I close my eyes, breathe deep, and imagine
hot lead scorching the sky before returning
to this world in its margins, this lonely *varrío*,
its descent quicker than lightning's strike.

I wonder what hand pulled the trigger,
what circumstances provoked it,
what rationale could be made.

Was there a woman involved?

Jealousy

Deceit

Fear

or merely desire biting at the body,
forcing someone to risk everything
for the empty promises flesh makes.

What justification can be made?

On weekdays like this one my children
have already left for the school down the block
where they play dodgeball, eat red gelatin
squares, shoot other children with terrible
cooties, and, whenever fire drills or practice
evacuations will allow, try to learn.

I wonder if my daughter heard the shots
while standing in front of the preschool
bungalow ready for recess and monkey
bars. I wonder if she noticed how the bullets'
blare seemed to hang in the air, out of tune,
unashamed like a drunken man challenging
anyone who will listen. I wonder if she now
glares up at the sky, distrustfully, protecting
herself with her thin arms, dark from sun,
half expecting something mean to fall down.

I wonder if my son heard the gun while playing
on the jungle gym, if he had been dangling upside
down from the bends of his knees, suspended above
the sandbox, if for a moment he was concerned,
and if his thick eyebrows had turned upwards.
I wonder if his wide grin has returned.

I wait for the phone to ring, expect to find
the tenor of a nurse's voice on the other side.
But when I pick up the phone,
 on the other side,
 nothing.

For so long I have wanted to believe the *varrio*
a beautiful but fickle flower capable of blossoming
at any hour. I have ignored the signs scrawled
all over the walls of my apartment complex,
choosing instead to pretend the sky permanent
and mute. But the *varrio* is no flower.

We've lied to ourselves for so long, since nearly
the beginning, even after Enoch tore the scales
from our eyes, showed us how the sky dog-ears
at its very edges like the yellowed pages of an old book,
a hymnal with songs the congregation no longer sings,
but keeps, because of its age, in fear of what is old.

If we would only tug, tug at the corner,
pull the page across the horizon, we could see:

The sky is nothing.

The moon broken,

the sun asleep.

See how the stars are thrown down?

The Cholo Who Said Nothing

I spray paint on walls—
 all asterisks and ellipses
 the dot dot dot of a message
 you can find in Indian ink over the length of my arms
Maybe it's an image of
 hands clasped together in prayer
 with nothing between them
 praying prayers that amount to nothing
or maybe it's a bible verse
 a quote from the Book of the Irrelevant
 chapter zero
 verse nada

I am the Cholo who says nothing

You may have seen me on stage
 on screen.
You may even be sick of me
 saying to yourself
 Enough
 This is not who we are
 This is not how I want us to be represented
 The Chicano is done with the cholo!
 that gangbanger hungry
 for dope and his own mother's blood.

You may point
 to the doctor
 to the lawyer
 to the dean of your college
 or even the migrant farmworker

You may even hold your breath whenever you see me
on the street
on the screen
but nevertheless
generations later

Here I Am

I am the Cholo Who Will Never Say Nothing
Do Nothing
Bring Nothing to the Table
but nevertheless

Here I Am

A Big Chief in the Brown Tribe filled with Brown Pride
waiting
for someone educated

like You

to Listen