

SPECIAL EDITION  
Santiago Vizcaíno's poem translated by Kimrey Batts

*For José Fernando Vizcaíno,  
in life and in death*

Song for My Son  
(poem at the brink of pathos)

I

I see you now and you are an echo in still water,  
your unformed face is the perfect silhouette  
of the river of memory that will come,  
now that I am the one guilty of your sex  
and I am bursting with the desire to touch you,  
I also say to myself:  
your life will not be the pain that left me adrift in filthy bars  
while the night guzzled the sun like dregs from the cup of the vanquished.  
You will not taste the early wretchedness of a chauvinistic father and his complexes,  
you will not feel asphyxiation in the well of poverty,  
you will not be struck by anyone or anything, save by amazement,  
no one will oblige you to be the best, nor will you see your home weep,  
because I penetrated your mother and I wished for the breath of your life.

II

One day I will see you asleep and your black eyelashes will brush my forehead.  
Your mother's womb is for now an enormous, silent valley,  
a bottomless nest.  
Out here, just violence,  
just millions of minds wracked with anguish.  
What do I have to offer you besides the chance to live on the margin,  
a kiss made flesh,  
the clairvoyance of a world that is not quite animal.  
This is what I should give to you:  
the small virtue of loving that which cannot be seen  
and which can just, barely, be named.

III

What is it that am I, little one?  
The molten sheath of language, perchance?  
The aspiration of the obituary?  
The crime of the unspeakable?  
If the ephemeral sets its paws upon the table  
and we take our seats to eat dirty flies,  
of what joy do we speak,

of what hypocritical smile do these words boast.  
I only mean, ruminative little creature,  
that the whole is merely an impression,  
the blurred trail of a secret.  
Ah, because secrets, my love,  
carry them with you to your grave,  
as the secret you will come to understand,  
when you learn to read between lines.

#### IV

Your limbs grow, and your heart, and the cries of your mother.  
And the offerings of flowers and the rain from your warm cerebrum.  
Everything is pleasure and fear.  
The street dogs also shiver with cold.  
I hide under the wooden mantle like a rat.  
This which I am, the uterus of tenderness,  
ends silently in-between the scream of a nightmare  
to which you are not invited.  
And the night already goes about, runs up against the abyss.  
The shadows have become accustomed to designating a body that is not his.

#### V

Your father is a flame: he whistles burning flowers.  
Sometimes, at midday,  
he falls into a deeply apathetic sleep to dream that he is an insect,  
trapped in the enormous web of language.  
He makes this place his habitat,  
but his life hangs upon a thread.  
Your father was born wizened,  
fed on muddy ditch water,  
filled, like a parasite, with the hunger of the night,  
but he also understood that the day was squandered  
between the canopies of the trees,  
among vagabond riff-raff,  
in the field of a concept that vanishes like a ring,  
in the slumber of an unborn child.  
Your father is not a flame, he is an insect.

#### VI

You are the tiny exhibit of our delirium.  
Your mother knits the tomb of her past.  
I unravel the past and create a mausoleum.  
But you, you overcome,  
you hear me beneath your blanket of water and I imagine you laughing,  
because this is another joke played by a mad god.  
Don't call me father, my son.  
Don't give me an authority created by my own ineptitude.

Don't say, I don't want to live in your world of black sands.  
Don't speak of a tender embrace on a rainy night,  
Don't name me as the heartbeat of sustenance.  
Say to me: brother, I cry because I am cold.

## VII

I am alone, my son.  
Alone is not a word, it is a crust of bread.  
When your cries sully the air,  
I will no longer be alone.  
Now there is a woman giving birth.  
A woman I loved.  
I am alone, my son.  
Alone is a drop of water on burnt flesh,  
alone is a crazed woman screaming in a eucalyptus forest,  
alone is the ocean seen from a cliff,  
alone is a countenance sowed in the sand,  
alone is the delirium of this beggar who speaks.  
He says: a woman I loved, a woman I loved...  
And his word spills on the sofa like a river of saliva.

## VIII

Home is a spiral of smoke,  
home is an baby pouch where horror nests.  
Come see me, my son, this is my home filled with ghosts.

## IX

You will learn to read the flame.  
Words = absence of flame when they want to say.  
Say  $\neq$  crossfire between two meanings.  
And it is so easy to yell mother, don't challenge me;  
Father, don't hit me.  
Before language, your laughter and your cries.  
I rest you on your mother's breast and we give name to the absence.

## X

I write the Bible.  
Every day I write the Bible.  
I say, Lord, let this merciful god be taken from me.  
Take pity, Lord, upon the children of my children burnt by the  
Sun.  
The god of my Bible, little one, is not a vagabond,  
he is a trace on the floor of a man, beautiful in body,  
but lost.



do not eat,  
stop,  
faaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaather  
and like a muscle,  
like a truck,  
like a sea shell. I HAVE THE RIGHT.

### XIII

The sea is an enormous conch like your mother's hatred.  
I will not see you.  
You will want an element,  
a meaning,  
if I reach you it is a miracle.  
But this smells of dust.  
A girl regards me, to give me the devastation.  
I say: "don't."  
The song of sex and death will go on forever.  
I say: "sing, idiots, that enviable waltz. Sing."  
And the song as if it were the angelus,  
so poor, so feeble...  
This occupies the place where ancient beings amassed.

### XIV

I write from the anguish of my remoteness.  
Were you born today?  
Birth and death are two heartbeats.  
I write from my remoteness.  
Language is just a shroud.

Like a womb alit  
You return to inhabit the plains.  
The fog falls like a thunderclap.  
Were you born today?

This desert is moistened for the first time.  
I write from the agony that turns,  
it is a drum,  
it is a revolver,  
it is daily machinations come undone  
Oh! You fall, abruptly.  
Just a little caterpillar.

Perhaps you were born today  
and I cannot find even  
a sad shadow to celebrate.

### XV

I saw your birth.  
I saw how you lifted up your prayer for water,  
your open-mouthed defeated profession.  
Now your father is afraid.  
This which distances us, my son, escapes my control.  
Your flesh is the color of night.  
I hope you understand,  
butterfly sleeping in the shadow's blade,  
little octopus in a sea of wool,  
hummingbird eyes overwhelmed by hunger,  
black-breasted *zamarrito* with white hands.  
I hope you understand that your father loves the free dissonance of injustice.  
It is not difficult,  
poetry has no mercy,  
out of hatred and love it makes two infinitesimal words.  
A rose is a rose,  
a street is a street,  
ecstasy is no longer ecstasy if things are designated as such.  
How do you name this species of guilt, this rage,  
this leopard of devastation?  
That which is brewed in words is an absurd search,  
failure after failure,  
double failure if I am not to see you,  
if you are not to be nourished by the fragrant carrion of this vaporous voice.

## XVI

Vapor that boils this night.  
My saliva, a trembling shell.  
Where are you, my son,  
perhaps occupying the sea like a gazelle?  
You have left again,  
empty swing of a fallen heart.  
Will you return to announce the night  
like the mirror which reflects the Moon's stolen light?

## XVII

Seeing you is precious,  
this word grazes the threshold of guilt.  
This absurdity is not an example / it's a curse.  
And if you choose hatred as figure,  
then living is a miserable flame.  
My trembling hand shall not touch you, not scald you.  
I shall not call you my son in delirious sleep.  
This guilty word imprisons.  
You will say, sir, you are my father,  
I don't recognize you.  
I am the entelechy,  
the vacuum of the law,  
the cold teat of a forgotten bottle.

If something beats, if something flows down a cheek,  
it will not be your unknown cries; it will be my dirty hand,  
my shameful face.

### XVIII

Child anchored in a name,  
Three names are a triad of desperation,  
what do I call you now?  
you've lost the night of your name,  
your name like an encyclopedia of failure,  
your wounded name is no longer yours.  
It means another person to you, this,  
but no,  
you're like a needle,  
don't prick at this humiliation!  
wasn't it so easy, the saying?  
you'll say this was your name silenced by your mother.  
you'll say father, don't forget that it is me.  
I have my smile with your dimples beneath the breath of a caress.  
you'll say what does it matter father, my mother is a miracle.  
and you father?  
this night, my son, this night is the silence,  
this night is your father drunk again  
knocking at the doors of your mouth.  
and then, what wonder!  
oh, the putrefaction of feeding human beings,  
oh stupid putrefaction of sowing the skirt of angst.  
my son, I stopped copying,  
I stopped lamenting my feeble language,  
but if it is fine by you,  
you'll cry only by night while I write this and you,  
what fury,  
an animal enslaved by the agony of hunger.  
a teat silenced by sex.  
these knees make you play, my son  
drink, my son, the formula is warm.

### XIX

Do you sense the frenzy of the rain through the window?  
Your cries are my cries.  
Your calm regards me beneath the sheet like a caress.  
You touch my beard.  
You are here, father, your gesture says.  
They have thrown me a lifeline, I reply.

### XX

This wall between your mother and I has barely a crack,  
although we live together.  
And nevertheless, there is no sacrifice.

You: thread, link, son,  
fury that unites two ghosts.

Us, head helmeted, body dying.

## XXI

A bad boy, papa.  
The Bible was not true.  
But how obvious, papa.  
Why have we defamed ourselves so.  
Not to understand, papa, the naked shoulder of your mother.  
A psalmody, you rolling over on the bed.  
Already seven months old!  
Do you hear the basin of this night?  
An abundancy of night circulates. Our bodies are smoke.  
This is simple. A bottle, your mother absent.  
Us far away. What hell love is, like two rats.  
You roll over again. I watch you. I imagine,  
make a video. *No Country for Old Men*.  
Oh, what wonder the desire to be together.  
Oh, what miracle awaits you.  
Oh, the empty mercy of silence.

## XXII

I have not been strong or good or wise.  
Not even a large house has protected me from the weeping.  
I have been a weak father beside a glass of beer.  
A tiny father like a pill.  
Every trace of me is erased in your head.  
Every memory washed out or dried beneath a blackened sun.  
This is my grief:  
Far away again.  
Alone, alone, alone.  
If we joined our loneliness together fire would rain down.  
I have not even been a father.  
Barely a mirage of flesh.  
Or perhaps a tombstone that says:  
“Here lies One whose Name was writ in Water.”



