

ABAJO DEL STORY (Underneath The Cuento)

Leticia Hernández-Linares

The story is counted because to tell is to count.

Like numbering splotches on skin, having to interpret
layers of wrinkles that now camouflage them.

Te voy a contar un cuento.

Splotches on skin, numerous, interpret,
keep time with the story she is going to tell you.

Te voy a contar un cuento.

It requires you breathe on a lower register.

The story she is going to tell you, in time, sinks
you try to hold most of it, trying to cut out parts.
Your breath dropping to a lower register will reason
if underneath is low and the bass is the lowest part,
then the bajo will play a good rhythm.

The story is counted because to tell is to count.

1. Her husband will not have spit out pieces of her devotion, by the door before
he slammed it. Me voy.

2. A black and white photograph of husband and wife in a peeling gold frame
will not sit on her dresser fifty years and many deaths later. Same dresser.

3. She will not have bandaged desperate hands in starless Hollywood apartments with the crinkled dollars she scrubbed for in two-story Pasadena homes. A mother's love.

4. Her oldest son will not spin the cylinder, will not lose to roulette.
Two out of three.

A good song rips the roots up from a telling
so you can move, hum the edges melodious.
Only repeat the honeyed notes,
like Donny singing the song right to you.

Move, hum the edges melodious and off-tune
until the order of things dances in your memory.
Tear the pages out, but don't bury them until
you sing the words right for you.

1. I met him crumpled under hospital linens, trying to die, small man
who left big wounds. ¿Te vas?

2. All the male copies of his face crumbled under the weight, so I wonder if
bones lowered into the ground can make good canes. Better we limp.

3. Everyone is asleep but no one is resting, and I keep going home.
A daughter's love.

4. The echo of so many footsteps pushes me to keep marching.
I am the soldier.

Te voy a contar un cuento.

The story that she will tell you.

Good for swaying to sleep.

But mine makes you hum

until you lose your breath.

The story is counted because to tell is to count.