

MERCY

Immigration officers call
off a massive hunt, state
there are too many
hurricanes in the areas
they want to pick apart.

We go right back to work,
in Houston, ask families
what they need after a storm.
One lady sits on a chair
outside her place, dips

a piece of mold in her black
coffee. She hands us bricks,
wet ones, says to take them
to help build that new wall,
said they won't even stop

all the rain drops from
crossing over in the night.
A little girl, traces a water
line in crayon in one room,
hasta aquí llegó on tippy toes.

Another man, hands us
his dripping eviction
notice, his face is soggy
with fright. He tell us
the cops will be here

soon to kick people into
the water logged street.
He asks us to find the word
mercy in the dictionary,
and rip the damn thing out.

ADVICE ON MY FIRST NIGHT IN THE KITCHEN AT THE GARDEN RESTAURANT

I see you, in between the blurs of sous chefs,
in bits of ladles that stick out of soups,

careful,

 don't let your sleeves get caught in chicken
stock flows around stove tops or the prep cooks,

skimming around that metal table, brilliant.

You should hustle here a few days more, nights
stay with you, with the hot rags in water,

waves of dishes steaming, your fingers stinging
 from cold and hot and flushed and chilled red
steaks, raw

under the blade, white tendons
nerve out on tan boards. We all get past

the fumbling flops of food on floor. You can pinch
 black headed strawberries,

 sink chocolate warheads,
settle them on mirrors, eat each shard, you can

take one. See?
 We always take two.
 Go ahead,
learn to make extra,

 shhh
 eat a brown pepper steak,

in butter rolls. It's the best meal in eight hours
standing, planning your escape,

pulling
 green lettuce into sheets, count the clock ticks,

multiply that
by the four dollars, twenty-five cents, we make.
Go crazy broke.
When you cut yourself, flesh, in the palm,
that becomes
 the only long break,
rummage around the back,
ask everyone you haven't met for the first aid kit.
Go again,
in between short order cook arms in sauces and pesto
coated vegetables.
 Don't touch the radio.
It's one hour Tejano,
 one hour Norteño,
 two hours Magic 102 Jams.
That's the secret to peace.
 You still bleeding a bit?
Get yourself an old rag,
 a black rag,
let go of the knife,
 let's dip your hand in the ice machine,
 stain the ice melts,
 eat that with me,
the taste, copper,
 pennies, the nickels,
 the dimes,
 they pay us to work
 until the lights go out.

ANGUSTIA VS. SILENCE

I cannot help you. When you cry,
you hide, inside a cave, under the dark,
a rock, mushroom, you can't even speak,
won't budge, won't share grief,
someone told you that a woman that cries,
is weak or that emotion is, a hot blanket
that makes everyone uncomfortable and
I know, at night, when we sleep, I
jerk and moan, you wince, and I haven't
even touched you, it is all the corked up tears,
your eye ducts have recorded all the falls,
a quiet birthday party every year and
only five people show up. I won't let you in,
its my own fucking house, I am Ponce de Leon,
and I claim you, my island, in the name of grieve.
Punch you, you big red balloon I think
flinch will make you shudder. One day all that energy
will flow right out of you, wildly, will pop. A molotov
brakes against some wall, up in my insides. I want
you to stop running away from you, end up in a circle,
out of breathe, lost, so just sit with me, let me touch
those nerves, untangle the veins coiled around your heart,
the damn things ache so much. I can see it in your silence,
you sit there, doing nothing, You wear sulk until it stinks.
I do not think I can help. You don't recognize this, deal in violence.
Gestures, plates broken on walls, a punch at the ribs,
a pot of scalding water across my arms, a hand between
the frame and its door, a frozen beer hurts only a few
minutes, throb, hurts, cracks in a skull. I know these things,
it is the home of impatience you live in. I bounce around
on the inside, grow thick skin, can see fists
fling at me, a whirl of grand mal seizure strikes
at my back, a trail of belt buckles latches on to my lips,
and I bleed. I know when hate decides where he stands,
leans, in the door. Drunk. Lost in a moment. Get lost with me,
just like that. Make it intimate. Throw a few things,
join this ruckus, the one time, I am used to. Let your body
flex a few screams, don't worry, take the hits.
At least I know you, at the end of it all. You will sleep.

MANOS (OR PRAYER HOLDING NIGHT)

a fist no
bullets out
the pop of skin
the twist of wrist
where scars pox out
coals rubbed together
where the air runs to hide
first seconds of fresh wound
el significado de un trancazo
gutting a confetti of fish scales
tocando Dos Monedas, siempre
the rash that spiders into bleed
reaching out in a pitch so black
gripping collected corn stocks
looking for change in pockets
metal across jawbones biting
bricks against me, against me
combs of warm water in hair
bandages holding paychecks
shovels up in the wet ground
translators when tongue slurs
a shave with a sizzling knife
abriendo ataud sin pesame
age measured in caguamas
red slices to a calf's throat
the nails that scratch white
dotted knuckles magnetic
cold bones on card tables
blisters wrapped in mint
a heart that waits to beat
a shake in the forearms
glass shards in tendons
boxing practice lessons
seconds jabbing reflex
boiled water thrown
thunder up on body
hacksaw for limbs
weighted fingers
axes split roots

the snap of ribs
a flung machete
palms cup clap
tenderness waiting
prayer holding night

A CHAIN MIGRATION OF WORDS

Why are we having all these people from shithole countries come here?
are we having all these people from shithole countries come here?
we hav all the people from countries come
all the people come here
we hav a shithole here
we hav the shithole here
Why we having the shithole here?
we all people from shithole countries here
we all the people from shithole here
shit come here
shithole come here
Why shithole u here?

LUPE MENDEZ

Lupe Mendez is a Poet/Educator/Activist, CantoMundo, Macondo & Emerging Poet Incubator Fellow, and co-founder of the Librotraficante Caravan. He works with Nuestra Palabra: Latino Writers Having Their Say to promote poetry events, advocate for literacy/literature and organize creative writing workshops that are open to the public. He is the founder of Tintero Projects and works with emerging Latinx writers and other writers of color within the Texas Gulf Coast Region, with Houston as its hub. His publishing credits include prose work in *Latino Rebels*, *Houston Free Press*, the *Kenyon Review*, and Norton's *Sudden Fiction Latino: Short Short Stories from the United States and Latin America*; and poetry that appears in *Huizache*, *Luna Luna*, *Pilgrimage*, *Border Senses*, *Tinderbox Poetry Journal*, *Glass Poetry Journal*, and *Gulf Coast*. His first collection of poetry, *Why I Am Like Tequila*, is forthcoming from Willow Books.