

THREE POEMS BY ILIANA ROCHA

STILL LIFE

for Aunt Carmen

Sorrow drizzles down, a gray feather, like a Vietnamese woman painting the Virgin Mary's minutiae on an acrylic

nail, she taps her finger on the margarita glass, claims the antihero for holiness is inside. What exactly have I evolved

past? *El Diablo no duerme* written in red lipstick on the edge of her cup stuck with salt, & the clouds on hangers are like

my grandfather's blue satin Houston Oilers jacket, oil derrick erect. Donkeys, globes, & assorted cartoon characters

half-cumbia from the ceiling by string, she takes out a CoverGirl compact powder in the lightest shade, cakes on layers

in a way that no one understood when I did it in high school in lieu of hanging out with the Mexican girls. The trumpets

& their relentless barking come by, serenading the table with "El Rey," & she is never afraid to confront nostalgia: *Remember when we*

crumpled up the rice fields, put them tequila-lit in barrels? When Daddy telegrammed himself back from Normandy? Our sticky mouths

of masa harina not a platitude, but a plea for domesticity we disowned? As a little old woman behind glass pounds

dough into tortillas, we line our newborns up in neat rows, build animals from shredded newspapers & papier-

mâché. I connect my skeleton with brass fasteners, adding a bow to my mouth with too-dark lip liner.

HOUSTON

I woke up with another migraine today because I suppose I should be in love. Did you know that the freeways begin with dirt packed on top of itself? Then goes the asphalt, then the concrete, then the little symbol of patriotism. The roaches I leave behind jump into unsuspecting handbags, & naked, I examine my body for places to pick it apart. I float above the roses the Mexican landscapers plant like the woman in the Chagall painting looking for a way out of his dream. *Up*, the only exit. I discipline Texas, just like our forefathers would have wanted, stealing the gallop from a horse while I strangle it with a lasso. How much my dad is a mirror to those men on bulldozers making a city for us, but somehow, he defied gravity by holding spinning police sirens in his hands like drunken planets. *Alarm bells went off*, the white officer says. My grandfather left a couple of his fingers in Normandy, & I have the telegram that officially discharged him framed in gold because I like tragedies still & where I can see them.

LANDSCAPE WITH GRACELAND CRUMBLING IN MY HANDS

A man hits on a woman, as Elvis would,
as subtle as a pool cue to the chest,
as careless as gunplay, a chandelier victim, as all
things covered in crystal are, like the studded rhinestone
suits displayed in a manner fit for mourning.
There is no celebration, despite the lights'
unconvincing attempts at glamour, each vitrine,
a confessional booth covered in lipstick graffiti,
the lumen brightness alternating in waves of what feels
like Catholic guilt & drunkenness, 1,000 years of Saturday nights
crammed into the baritone prayer of bass guitar crumbling from a speaker.
Another woman weeps at the surprise of his gravesite, there,
situated by the stillborn twin's, a cloud Elvis tried unsuccessfully to move
all his life. The horses, too, know better, as their black shields
paint their view very, very forward.

“Still Life,” “Houston,” and “Landscape with Graceland Crumbling in My Hands” are from Iliana Rocha’s book *The Many Deaths of Inocencio Rodriguez*. They appear here with permission by the author.