

October 18, 2023

Who will remember us when we're gone? What sort of legacy will we leave behind? These existential questions are front and center as the speaker ponders the remnants of her mother's life and how they both anchor and propel her forward on the Jetstream of her daughter's impending adulthood. Reassurances about a life well lived aside, perhaps the answers we seek are less important than the fact that we cared enough to ask them in the first place. (Caridad Moro-Gronlier)

People worry about what they're going to leave behind, who will remember them when they're gone. But what about all those dents and scrapes we left behind, what we sloughed off, discarded, all those forests razed? Sitting on the beach in front of the Betsy, just months after my mother had died of a heart attack, I thought about my daughter's concern about how we are seen, who sees us. I thought about the impressions we've left on the planet. I was alone, on a writing residency, extremely comfortable, and tended to that weekend. In those days, I read at least five books of poetry, and I filled many pages of my journal, even drafted a few poems. I thought about all the poets that had written in that room before me, those that would come after. Everything was shining and ephemeral that morning on a Florida beach. (Alexandra Lytton Regalado)

TO MY DAUGHTER WHO WANTS ALL MY POEMS TO BE ABOUT HER

Maya, these days my heart is a closed fist
and I see things in the corner of my eye, thinking—mother, ghost—
and when the page turns, it's a frizzled oasis on asphalt. How much
we want to believe in signs from our dead, the white egret appears everywhere
reminding us absence is not about emptiness, but
a presence that smothers like heat
here, where swindlers once sold swampland to suckers;
I feel the flames of this last frontier, Florida, this once wasteland,
rising seas licking my soles and the waves try not
to look like cliches; they make an effort to bend
like the shapes of an alphabet
of bird shadows drawn on a page, of braided palm,
of my parents' hurtful letters to each other,
and the way my mother's handwriting arced and arched
and all other ways to spell saudade
and, yes, it's true, Maya, I might be sewn to her shadow
and the stories she used to tell me as a child I now tell you,
and you will find it hard to read her handwriting,
jagged as the coast of Florida, and if now,
daughter, you know more than I know,
now that you're taller than me, why I gave you a name
that sounds the same in every language
and it means mother in all tongues
and you will one day read these words
and find it will be ok to stop asking where are the poems
about me, searching the table of contents
and acknowledgments; daughter, have you given reason to why
these words extend the horizon line and why I keep asking where
is my mother in these lines, the lines she sowed and I harvested,
where is she now not in daylight; the sea is rising—will you know, Maya,
why I'm unable to place my mother in these lines or
in the stars with names clouded over,
or find her in the planet I think shifts and winks
only for her eldest daughter, me,
on this lavender shore that blurs to cloud,
where our feet in sand blur to fin, to wing?

Alexandra Lytton Regalado is a Salvadoran American author, editor, and translator. She is the author of *Relinquenda*, winner of the National Poetry Series (Beacon Press, 2022); the chapbook *Piedra* (La Chifurnia, 2022); and the poetry collection, *Matria*, winner of the St. Lawrence Book Award (Black Lawrence Press, 2017). Alexandra is the translator of *Family or Oblivion* by Elena Salamanca and *Prewar* by Tania Pleitez. She is co-founding editor of Kalina, a press that showcases bilingual, Central American-themed books and she is assistant editor at *SWWIM Every Day* an online daily poetry journal for women identifying poets. www.alexandralyttonregalado.com