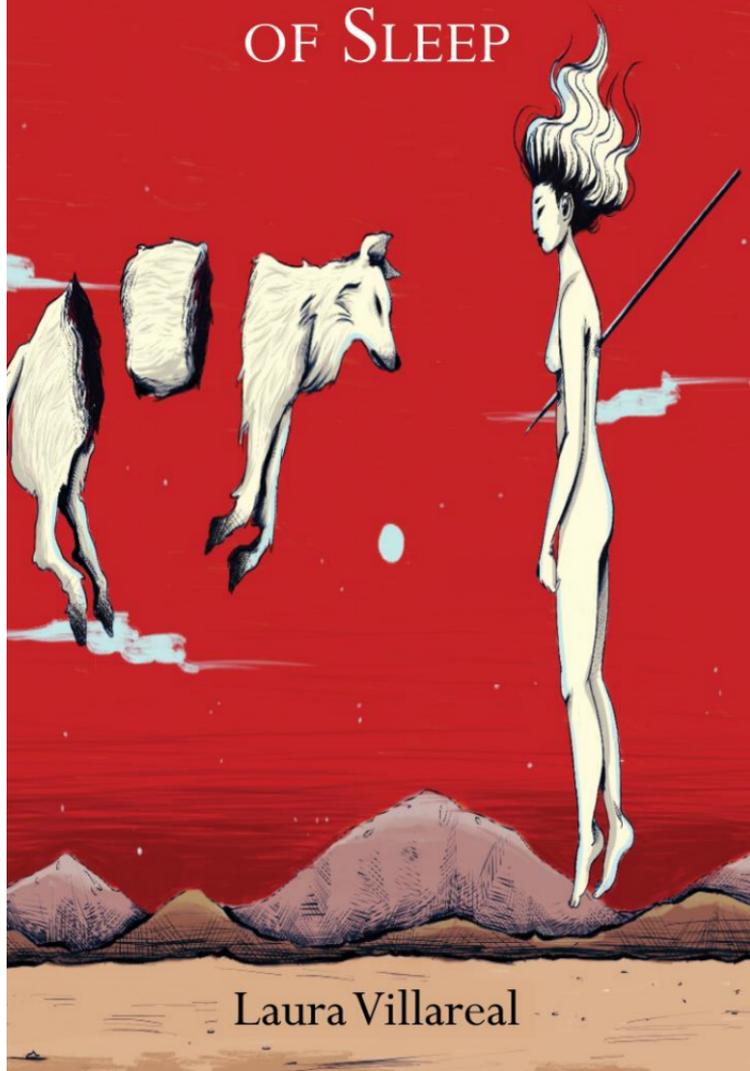


THE CARTOGRAPHY OF SLEEP



Laura Villareal

The Cartography of Sleep

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Nostrovia! Press

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“Your silence will not protect you.” – Audre Lorde

The Astronomer's Daughter

I haven't seen the stars since August,
but I remember each pinhole of light.

Silver coyote teeth
marks on astral deerskin. In the distance:
whimpers & howls.

I haven't seen the stars since August,
but seldom think of running with coyotes

or chasing the full moon until it's new again.
Except when I chart constellations

on the body of a man or woman,
the restlessness becomes unbearable.
But I like it that way.

When I disappear, I only leave teeth
marks. I can hear whimpers
& howls in the distance.

I like it that way.

Artemis Chases Huehuecoyotl

under the harvest moon. Huehuecoyotl leaps over
Hecate's fence, into her garden. Artemis follows,
leaving footprints in the dewdrop mud.
Huehuecoyotl's four coyote
paw prints zigzag, as jagged as their clawed toes.
They both trample Hecate's magical flowers:
the wolfs bane,
belladonna, & lavender—
Artemis bumps into the beehive,
the little tin roof house jiggles
enough to awaken the sleeping bees.
When the bees look out at the sky, they see
an orange moon, but feel no heat & they're unsure
whether or not the sun has merely gone cold.
So they begin
their buzz buzz of work
under the second sun. Huehuecoytl turns
into a woman, naked & muddy.
They steal some purple honey from the bees'
mostly empty hive.
It drips sluggishly down their sun-
stained fingers in the same unhurried way
that days of waiting pass.
Artemis shoves them down to the soft soil,
elated, after waiting
a year & an hour to see
her partner in their human form.

Their talking melts into laughter & kissing—

Huehuecoytl shifts irrepressibly

from woman to

man

& back again.

Every part of them wants

to be with Artemis during

whatever time they have

before the bees return to their hive

& the sun eats the moon.

Trapping Season

Within the thick evergreens, a snow-bearded cottage blows smoke from its pipe. The cottage has makeshift patches on its elbows, coffee-stained windows, & stories to tell. A man stokes the fire—cracks wood into sparks at the hearth. He puts out food for the foxes. A vixen eats it without knowing she must give something in return.

*

He pushed me against the wood paneled wall, restrained my arms. Rigid breath in my ear: “I love you....” If my wrist bones shattered I’d be able to slip away. “...if you leave me, I’ll kill myself.” Crying. A fragile glass man fell to the floor. If I left right then would his blood be liquid or sand? It’s unclear how to leave when his body guards the door.

*

The vixen now sleeps at the hearth. Heat radiates in every follicle of her fur. Never does she go without a meal. She’s glassblowing a man’s heart, precariously spinning molten sand.

*

I don’t know who taught me to pull a knife from a chest—a reflecting pool blade ebbing slow blood. Not sure who taught me the words to coax a knife from his hands. Not sure anyone would believe me if I told them.

*

As the flames slumber under the charcoal skin of their logs, the vixen continues to dream. The floorboards groan under the weight of footfalls, which startles her awake. She inhales too deeply, rousing the embers. An axe crashes to the floor.

*

People ask about the bruises & I tell them I'm clumsy. I tell them they're purple pansies, yellow-eyed I love yous winding their green stems around my body. The truth gets caught in my throat.

*

No one ever hears when she scratches at the windows or howls. No one hears the vixen except the ancient house. It has stories to tell, but no one ever said it would repeat them. Snow falls off the eaves. Needles fall off the trees. The vixen's tail hangs from the ceiling.

Hidden Roots

I don't want your body to split
lightning inside of me dishonestly.

Within a moonflower's bloom,
I've resisted the urge to touch you,

imagined solace rise in my body
like the smell of wet soil at dawn.

I'm ashamed of my desire.
Call it innocence—water

lily on an India ink lake.
Whichever name trades day in selflessness.

Whichever tastes like original sin.
To you this confession is rotting

piety, sweltering selfish as Japanese honey-
suckle among crushed baby's breath.

Slash-and-Burn

A stranger's hothouse grows my heart
at 3 a.m. I'm leaving,
unhurried, like first kindling
nestled into a field's edge.

The devil's hour spills ash, muddied & familiar.

Even the guard dogs continue sleeping
as the latch clicks into the strike plate,
as I run a stick across the fence line
so it sounds like footfalls of someone
chasing behind me.

Not even a block away,
I make Persephone's mistake.
I knew I would
after she asked me to stay &
cultivate my gods.
But something still runs wild in me.

A stranger's hothouse has harvested
my heart, climbing into bed
next to her, I continue insisting
I didn't scorch the earth
to make room for her & an ember
blossoms as simply a morning lily.

The Astronomer's Wife

turns her rainstick over
 slowly,
giving Tlaloc time
 to hear each pebble's rhythmic descent
 through the dried cactus pipe
 like the susurrus of prayers.
Plump raindrops plummet
 before transforming into heron feathers—
 thousands of them
 drifting
from the star speckled sky.
 Her husband continues
to gaze at Andromeda
 through his ancient bronze telescope,
enamored with celestial phenomena
 even when minor miracles occur
on earth. The feathers stick to her body,
 her neck snaps
 out of place
 & elongates like a swan's.
The astronomer's wife snatches
 feathers from the air, burying
their calamus into her own skin;
 bloodletting & beckoning Tlaloc
to come down
 from the heavens.

Origin of the Starchild's Skull

Coyolxauhqui grabs a comet by its tail,
wraps it around the bellhop's throat,
loops it in

& out, pulls it tight

into a necktie & says:

“The moon won't push itself across the sky.”

The bellhop follows her around the universe

trolleying her baggage on a brass
birdcage cart.

When the starchildren ask about her bags,

their parents tell them:

“Coyolxauhqui eats bad starchildren. She grinds

their bones into stardust

& keeps it in her bags.”

So night after night

the starchildren dare one another

to touch the bags.

When they reach them,

the bellhop slaps their hands,

shakes his head, & says:

“You must swear a blood oath

if you want to take a peek.”

They simply giggle,

glowing brighter than

the city lights below,

before running away to finish playing

hopscotch in the meteor bramble.

Coyolxauhqui loves the starchildren’s jingling

laughter & gives the bellhop konpeito

to offer them for their naïve courage.

The starchildren play this game nightly until

one night a child runs

toward the birdcage cart, giggling.

As always, the bellhop prepares to catch her

before she reaches it,

but she trips over a comet's tail.

She stumbles, falls,

& her throat lands on the sickle edge

of the crescent moon, decapitating her.

Light shoots away

from her head—

without it, her skull can no longer

defy gravity.

Coyolxauhqui tries to catch it,

but it's too late.

The starchild's skull

falls

&

falls

until it lands in Mexico.

The Long Trajectory of Grief

A squeal cracks bright like hot metal in water.
Before the sun has licked across the fields, I wonder how

to save myself before guilt sets like a stain. I wonder
if the constellations above me can lift shame or if they're only

a temporary solution for what I feel. In the morning
I find three wild boars in the street, dead. A red

bumper lying near one of their carcasses.
Is the nature of a crash to always leave something behind?

Fog glimmers up from the road forsaken
by first light. I pretend not to notice

your absence—how my car isn't spiced with your oakmoss
& mint anymore. But I pray the vultures pick me

clean like a Tibetan sky
burial before anyone smells grief on me.

I Still Check for Monsters Before I Go to Bed

When the night bloggers
have had their fill of memes
& trending acts of
violence, I search for you:
[URL redacted]
—I want to know how
you're doing. Well,
I want to know that you're un-
happy, that you're 2000 miles away,
& you can't touch me. In my dreams,
you appear disguised as
a shoebox on my doorstep.
When I open you,
there's shotgun & flare
gun shells. The too familiar
odor of Diesel
cologne, brass & birdshot—
it still makes me want to run,
but I don't, because I see
a girl sitting in all the chaos
tweeting in Morse code:
3 dots, 3 dashes, 3 dots.

You'll awaken & transform
when I try to rescue her,
but I have a plan. I'll wake myself up
just enough to control my dream—
to turn myself into glass
before you hit me. This time,
it'll be your blood instead of mine.

(My)thology

my birth was a blank star chart midday & minor miracle

I grew in a cardboard kingdom built my quiet

harvesting words for a fallow season savored them

like sea glass left in my pocket I'd need them later

in my teen years I battled someone else's monsters

my own monster was patient caught in my throat

silence like a wishbone I broke off the bigger end

born perpetually lucky or so the story goes

the monsters left their teeth burrowed in my body

those hidden treasures took root in my blood

& luck followed me into the dark picked my bones

into tuning forks but that was all

I sold my own heart with a sign that said: *haunted*

free or best offer It's true I was born lucky

found my heart floating down river caught
in tendrils of wild rice I traded my gently used words

to a Cave Salamander who told me I couldn't
keep mapping stories if they weren't my own

he flicked my tuning fork bones & told me
other people needed to sing my pitch

Retellings

The clouds choked on sunlight the afternoon you told me every story has at least two versions. In our warren, you stroked

my long, brown ears as you said, “Lucky Paw, stories multiply like us rabbits. They change but come from the same source.”

The kettle whistled steam until you removed it from the fire & I asked: “But if they change, how do we know which one’s true?”

You drop manzanilla from our garden into each cup & pour hot water over. “Everyone has their own version of the truth.

Take La Coneja en la Luna for example...”

Manzanilla flowers rose to the surface of our cups.

“...in every version she becomes a sacrifice.

In the story you know she throws herself onto the fire

to feed Quetzalcoatl since she has nothing to offer the hungry god. As reward for her selflessness,

he placed her image on the moon.” I blew on my yellow tea, the flowers caught waves like little boats in a storm.

You used both paws to lift the cup to your mouth to drink before you said, “Another telling of the story goes something like this,

during the year of the fifth sun a rabbit was thrown at Tecciztecatl by the other gods, bruising his face—

the moon’s face. The rabbit’s imprint forever obscuring a deity. In China, they believe something similar to the first story—

that the rabbit generously threw herself onto the fire
to feed one of their deities & her smoke outline rose

up from the flames staining the white moon.”

Today in the blueberry fields I think of these different versions

of the truth, imagining them like a rabbit warren, each story in
one of the interconnected rooms. I watch you pick blueberries

& put them into a wicker basket, wondering how many times
we've told different versions of the same story.

Afterwards

*"I was born under a bad moon.
My grief is that I have one grief
which outweighs all the joy there is."
—Miguel Hernández*

for years my ruling planet was grief
I travelled through life engulfed

anyone who touched me blistered
but I couldn't see who added kindling

when I wanted to speak the truth buckshot fell from my mouth &
it only rose when I was a wasteland my words burned for months

I wanted to scream when I saw anyone who had your face
an open field full of shotguns locked me in a memory

some years I was more animal than severed root or
burning star unable to satiate a need to revisit the source of

a longing to undo what was done bruises that were no longer
only able to hide inside purple & yellow galaxies

the mud nest of my body kept beating a lullaby
where at least birds would rest after the gun was lowered

Sardine Spine

Never have I seen vertebrae so small,
so white like a strand of pearls
without luster, unclasped.

The spine is tenuous,

made for a touch more
tender than mine—

The sardine smells like the holes
of my pierced ears.
My body has never learned to heal

even after all this time. I keep pushing
metal posts through my ears so they'll stay
open. But maybe I should let them close.

My body is as stubborn as I am,
but which of us knows best?

Maybe if I could hold the sardine's spine
gently, without breaking it,
it would become a pearl necklace clasped
to my throat as I speak the answer.

Spooky Action at a Distance

I can hear a black hole bend light outside my window.

It sounds like a splitting seam or the space

between my fingers. I tried to sew my fingers together.

Even bound them in leather & twine. But no matter
how I tethered them, they ripped & re-created space.

I bustle down the icy cobblestone, yelling:

“I’m running a sale! Thimbles, needles, & buttons

only 50 cents.

I also have a free class on cross-stitching
galaxies every orbit of Charon.”

I’ve seen 10,555 moonrises & like every particle on Pluto,
I wait for entanglement to occur,

for my partner particle to spin

& my own spin to be determined by what particles call,
“spooky action at a distance.”

How many half-lives must I wait

to find momentum?

& what about on Earth,

people gushed about Pluto’s heart
until they knew it was broken.

What is it about distance & separation
that causes universal unease?

I toss & turn
a ball of yarn in my hand, thinking of Pluto,
Earth & my partner particle probably light years away.

I mumble:
“I wish I could collapse into myself
like a black hole. Then at least my gravity would matter.”

Just as my wish enters the ether, I feel myself begin to vibrate,
begin to know my spin—
a tingling of recognition,
but then the feeling stops

It stops & fades gently like

two ends of newly cut string.

The Neck or the Dock

In a blackout curtained room, a woman continues
sleeping through daylight.

Somewhere between consciousness & dreams,
she weaves harp strings into docking rope
or maybe a noose. All around her

luminous bodies backstroke & butterfly
through gray matter. I skip jewels across the shallows

of her breath. Waves catch them in their salt
teeth, gnash them until they release sorrow
into the gray matter.

The sorrow makes the luminous bodies ravenous.
They drown each other to devour it.

The luminous bodies whimper when all the sorrow's gone,
sinking back into the murky depths of the gray matter.

With a sigh, the woman begins to wake. A whirlpool forms
above her body. There's no escaping. I'm pulled in,
pulled into a woman's body—

a body that I'm forced to recognize as my own.

Inside the Foxhole

My features are small,
expressionless. My lovers say
I look like a doll. Today
I climbed into a black dollhouse
& felt more at home than anywhere
I've ever been. The wild in me
stopped howling, stopped pulsing
through my legs. Egyptians used mirrors
to reflect light into dark spaces.
As I walk to my apartment, the buildings fill
dim streets with the last segment of sunlight.
I begin thinking of how the wetness
between my legs might spill out
of my black lace panties & fill the gutter
with quicksilver. The Gibbous Moon above
Newark Penn Station watches me.
I wait for her to call me, to say,
hide where I can't find you.
She hasn't called me by name
since I walked home
with runs in my stockings.
I heard her voice on the wind
once say: *If we believed in God,*
we'd both be damned. I told her
I liked soft violence best,
like a starling fallen into a foxhole.
But didn't tell her I cried
during a dream I had
of holding my melting planet.
Above me, a plane flies
across the tangerine sky
leaving a contrail. Instead of one long, perfect

white streak, it comes out in Braille.
The contrail reads: *Never have I been so alone.*
With no way of feeling those words,
I walk more quickly. In my apartment,
I striptease for the woman I'm seeing.
She pushes me on my bed.
Her hands are cold. She licks quicksilver
from between my legs. Stops.
Says she can taste the champagne I drank—
can hear giddy bubbles filling each
& every one of my moans. Sometimes I want
to say: *if only your body was a home,*
if only I wasn't hollow like a doll.

Apology

Body, I want to bury you
in fresh out of the dryer blankets.
Let you bathe in green tea & sunflowers.
I haven't been good to you. Filled you

with poison. You've been in danger.
You've been taken in the night.
I didn't look for you

until weeks passed. I admit
I didn't miss you until I forgot
how crooked your pinkie toes are,

how soft your hands can be. I never meant
to climb back in you, but someone asked

how I felt. Without thinking
I replied: "Disembodied." A joke
only my body could love.

The Conditions for Existing as Proposed by X, Y, & Z (What Makes Sense, What's Safe, What's Productive)

X.

I think
to enact violence on another person
I enact violence on myself
& I admit violence hums back
over my body laced in grief
ripening into
I have to save myself

Y.

every question is rhetorical
my answer eats its way up

I wait for reparations
knowing nothing can ever fill
a needful bruise
before it's too late

Z.

my eyes dodge my own gaze
until I can confess
like a vine around a fence
all answers get strangled
knowing they've been lost
on the way a lifetime
as an overflow

Honey Bee Theorem

Don't trust the bees when they ask
if they can inject honey into your back.

They merely want to sample
your spinal fluid—
qualify the salinity of your lifespan.

[Quick math:

seven billion minus the ones you loved
divided by six

Calculator reads: **ERROR**]

No equation can calculate the people you could have loved.

Using a scale of salt mine to seawater,
the bees might decide to build
honeycombs in your vertebrae, might carve
horizontal hexagons into the bone
& etch the initials of everyone
you've never loved
before you can even melt their wax.

Luck comes in sets of three—
multiply that by two,

divide the surface space of lumbar three

by six centimeters by six centimeters.

No one is looking at anything besides

the work it took you to arrive at

the solution.

If I Invited You to Love Me

I'd tell you I'm a four-way intersection
in a town made for shooting movies
& yes, the traffic light still works.

I'd tell you my burial ground planted a home
& everything I own fits in my tear ducts.

I'd tell you even after long-term collapse,
black holes go undetected.

I'd tell you my Netflix queue is trash
because some nights elongate & I trick myself
into thinking a romcom will bore me to sleep,
but I watch the whole damn movie
until, crying, I fall asleep.
Every. Single. Time.

I'd tell you I don't think ideal love
looks anything like a romcom.

I'd tell you most people don't know
rollie pollies are crustaceans
& ask what else people misidentify.

I'd tell you I've gone to museums 52 times
this year, but I only go when I'm lonely.

I'd tell you I'm not always sure
being alone is worse than
allowing someone to splinter me.

I'd tell you I've never seen a relationship that wasn't
barter or been in one that wasn't outright robbery,
but vicarious living isn't enough anymore.

Baby Teeth

some afternoons music sways like a broken screen door
in a distant part of a house I was never a god in. it's flooded

with marigold light & it makes sense that my milk
teeth have been traded to deep south spiritualists.

they say I was born fanged & feathered like
no child from heaven should be. a miracle

that when I lost those teeth I became human.
my feathers burned one by one each year of my life.

I'm tired of the way my mouth fills with guava
seeds like infant pearls. give me blood

from pomegranates. I demand tears
in every screen door in the south until

they fall off their hinges or every onyx tooth
is planted in the ground around my body. wait.

let a song come first from a black storm rolling
over the still sorghum fields. I am nothing

if not determined to recreate myself as a god.
so let the birds steal my teeth from the ground

& hide them in their babies' open beaks.
listen for the heavy stillness before the rain

& know I am waiting to become whole again.

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Laura Villareal earned her MFA from Rutgers University-Newark. Her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Palette Poetry*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Waxwing*, and elsewhere. She has received scholarships Key West Literary Seminar and The Highlights Foundation.

More of her writing can be found at: www.lauravillareal.com

*When I disappear, I only leave teeth
marks. I can hear whimpers
& howls in the distance.*

With each page Villareal pushes her text to transform and so we encounter the map as text for guidance, map as data, map as myth. Each bit of movement expands the landscape Villareal's poems define and, in doing so, charts wider territory for the reader to move into. I'm saying, with *The Cartography of Sleep* I stepped into a series of bound pages and stepped out into an expanse. How grateful I am for it.

—JR Mahung, *Since When He Have Wings* (Pizza Pi Press)

Laura Villareal's *The Cartography of Sleep* is a sublime map of dreams and a guide to the heart's darkness. Finding your way in her poetry is no easy journey. Villareal offers her readers new mythologies and seasons. The turns are sometimes bloody, sometimes funny, sometimes wild, sometimes surreal, but all the time enlightening. Make no mistake, these poems bite back, sweetly, vengefully, and with grace. Or put simply, these poems are dangerous.

—Willie Perdomo, *The Essential Hits of Shorty Bon Bon*
(Penguin Poets)

NIP