

# Madre

I watch her from behind the screen  
door, as she limps across the front yard, yellowed  
eyes. She moves slow,  
each step calculated, counted, deliberate,  
like a child unfamiliar with the earth.

When did she become so breakable?  
Her breath spreads over the dried dirt, familiar knees  
popping a sharp melody. She's come to cultivate  
the plants, relinquish her soma.  
Her single mothers' heartbeat  
has never been more feverish  
than today, secrets boil in her gut, her vandalized  
body betrays her.  
Her horsehair leather belt fists  
meant for keeping my brother's  
hands from straying into the hands of pandilleros  
melt into the soil. I smell the wild  
of her tears, I see the drip of lost cartilage,  
labios hechos de fuego, and the black dye  
of thinning hair pour over scorched  
earth. Her sobs de Jocón y Pepián wilt the bougainvillea.  
Her dead father's hands crack  
in her voice, cutting weeds.  
Her mother's ghost steamrolls  
penciled in eyebrows, smothering los geranios.  
Her lifeless brother's motorcycle revs  
in the curve of her frozen shrapnel  
ankle, the nísperos vibrate.  
Her worn womb lumps in the throat  
of a dehydrated cactus, encrusted  
with mechanics grease.

How has she made it this far?  
How has she not been obliterated?  
How has she not bled  
out from all the wounds she carries?

She is a cactus.  
Like the one in the front yard, that looks sick  
and thirsty as it folds over itself, pieces falling off.  
Still, it's roots have never been stronger,  
it's never bloomed  
brighter,  
or thornier,  
or thirsted  
for more in this life.