

Carpenter Road

For Claudio Duran

Carpenter Road,
tell me how you grew in height
and dreamed of holding the moon in your hands,
how your bruises healed,
how scrapes turned into scabs in the onslaught of dusk,
how you dreamed of the hot summer sand
and yellow flowers *with your eyes of clean simplicity.*

Carpenter Road,
tell me of the girl with dark hair
about her face, how you wanted her
to stand in the rain with you, in that warm spring rain,
the dragonflies taking a moment to drink
in *the river water that inundates the aromo trees.*

Carpenter Road,
tell me of the comings and goings of people,
the soft movement of the hills,
how the children grew up, moved away,
how it has been years since they'd walked on your spine,
years since you felt them get heavier, walk faster,
the moon overhead and listening, you stopping
for a moment *when night fog fell upon the snow,*
the gray streetlights rising, *the salty wind*
singing its cold notes.

Carpenter Road,
tell me that all this mattered,
that the tilt and sway of sex mattered,
tell me those who once knew you
will be alright, that they'll find what they're looking for,
perhaps in *the voices of the reeds*
and someday return with *the invisible sounds of dawn*
and all their experiences, those *dreams made of love*
and dust and light, will emerge from overgrown fields
and greet them.

Carpenter Road,
snow surrounds your waist.
Now that your children are older,
they help their own children put on their coats
and you can finally hold the moon in your hands
and take a bite out of it, and say:
—I have tasted the moon!—
and it tastes like a world of symbols, a structure of bones,
a tropical storm falling on another life far from here,
a neighbourhood where you never lived.

Carpenter Road,
tell all those who've walked your grey pavement:
you remember feeling their footprints on your skin.

[anthology: *Poet to poet: poems written to poets and the stories that inspired them* – Guernica Editions Inc., Fall 2012, pp. 82-83, Story pg. 84] [ISBN-13: 978-1-55071-645-0] [CANADA] Edited by Julie Roorda and Elana Wolff.

The story that inspired the poem

There is a road not far from where I live called “Carpenter Road,” and it sounded to me like the title of a best-selling novel, involving various families that lived on that road, how they got along or didn’t, which people left and which returned, covering several generations of families, newer ones moving to the neighbourhood, and how a community changes over time. I was thinking of writing that novel, and perhaps, someday I shall, but for now poetry is how I express myself in the written form. I also thought of a wonderful poem by Marie Howe that Rob Colman showed me, called, ‘Why the Novel is Necessary but Sometimes Hard to Read,’ which talks about the experience of reading a novel: “You come upon the person the author put there / as if you’d been pushed into a room and told to watch the dancing”//. I was trying to convey that novel feeling in the poem, with magic realism, beautiful language, repetition, and many clauses that build one after another. From the first draft the poem was dedicated to Claudio Duran, a wonderful poet. Italicised words in the poem are from his collections: “After Silence” and “Childhood and Exile.” Claudio was among the ~180,000 Chileans who went into exile after Pinochet overthrew Allende in 1973. I first met Claudio at York University, at a series he ran for 20+ years with fellow poet Ned Hagerman called “Readings at Noon.”