

“Riox totik riox”

that’s how she prayed to the saints
making the sign of the cross every time the sun came up.
Now along with the night
she seeks the arms
the back of any man.
“Riox,” the old ones say,
they don’t understand that the moon has changed her face.

•

“Riox totil riox”

así, rezaba a los santos
y en todas las salidas de sol crucificaba el rostro.
Ahora, habitúa
junto a la noche buscar los brazos,
la espalda de cualquier hombre.
“Riox”, dicen los ancianos,
no entienden que la luna cambió de rostro.

•

“Riox, jtotil riox”

jech to’ox la ak’opon li jtotiketike
cha p’is to’ox asat ta jujun sob.
Le’ ne, jel akuxlejal
chachi’in ta xanoval li ak’obale
cha sa’be spat, sk’obtak li viniketike.
“Riox”, xi’ik to li moletike,
Kucha’al sok kucha’al jel sat li jme’metike.

Between my legs I hide a droplet of night
on my cheek and shoulder they huddle like fireflies,
the shade of three lovers,
I don't know if there's any truth in what they say
but I keep that birthmark in a coffer.

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Entre mis piernas escondó una gota de noche
en mi mejilla y hombro se agazapan como luciérnagas,
la sombra de tres amantes,
no sé, si hay algo de verdad en lo que dicen
mas en un cofre guardo aquel lunar.

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Jnak'oj ta sk'al ko'tak jts'uj ak'obal
noch'ol xkukavetik ta xokon jsat xchi'uk jnekeb,
ox-vo' viniketik chamenxa la ta smul,
vu'une mu jna'mi jech li a'yejaletike
ja' no'ox jk'ejoj ta jun muk' ta kaxa li tseke.

María

the moon doesn't make you a woman,
yet butterflies are born in your womb.

María

delicate body, it must be buried in the words
that bought your first caress.

•

María

la luna no te convierte en mujer,
mas en tu vientre nacen mariposas.

María

frágil cuerpo, habrá de sepultarse en las palabras
que compran la primera caricia.

•

Maruch

li jme'emetike ch'abal to sjoybinot ta ants,
pe ta yut a ch'ute chvok'anan xa pepenetik.

Maruch

abek'tale chk'ataj ta k'ambail,
ta xich' mukel ta lo'iletik.

Ana renounced love
stayed alone beside the fireplace, in a corner
tied to her mother's womb.
They never uttered her name
never married her off
no one dared to court her
to whisper fleshly desires in her ear
no one stroked her breasts nothing sated her hunger.

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Ana renunció al amor
sola quedó a lado del fogón en una esquina
atada al vientre de su madre.
Jamás pronunciaron su nombre
jamás la desposaron
nadie se atrevió a cortejarla
a susurrar al oído el deseo de la carne
nadie acarició sus pechos nada sació su hambre.

•

Ana la sjip lok'el ta yo'nton ti k'anvaneje
chotol kom stuk ta xokon sk'ok'
ta chikin na ta yichon sme'.
Mu buch'o lok' ta ye sbi
ch'abal bu la sta nup xchi'il
mu'yuk bu laj ta k'oponel ta be
mu'yuk boch'o la smukul albe ta jchinot k'ai
ch'abal bu laj ta k'upinel mu'yuk k'usi la slamtsanbe sbek'tal.

I search for you, I search for me
Where did our paths go, where did our toys go?
Where did your body go?
I search for you on the way to the cemetery, the forest, the cantina.
Who dared to tarnish you?
They screamed whore at you
while you sniff cocaine
paint your nails
until your voice falls silent.

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Te busco, me busco
¿Dónde quedó nuestro camino, dónde quedaron los juguetes?
¿Dónde quedó tu cuerpo?
Te busco camino al panteón, al bosque, a la cantina.
¿Quién se atrevió a mancillarte?
Te gritaron puta
y aspiraste cocaína
te pintaste las uñas
hasta callar tu voz.

•

Ta jsaot, ta jsa'jba
¿Bu' kom jxanebtik, bu' koman kixtoltik?
¿Bu pak'al kom abek'tal?
Ta jsaot ta schoneb pox, ta sbelal mukinal, ta vitstik.
¿Bucho'o la stuch' achi'el?
yats' jlumaltik la utat
ta anil la jik' ti sakil jchuvajesvaneje
la bon li sni' avich'ak
ja' to k'uxi ch'an xi ave.

She dreams of being a TV actress
every night at eight on the dot, she rushes
grabs the most comfortable seat
and coffee in hand starts to think
about the girl's tight dress, her makeup
her blond hair and the car.
No less important is the man
who will rescue her from the squalor of life.
If only that were her, she imagines
while she takes the baby in her arms.

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Ella sueña con ser actriz de televisión
todas las noches en punto de las ocho, presurosa
toma la silla más cómoda
y con café en mano comienza a pensar
en el vestido entallado de la chica, el maquillaje,
el cabello rubio y el coche.
No menos importante es el hombre
que la rescatará de la inmundicia del ser.
Si fuera ella, imagina
mientras toma al bebé en brazos.

•

Ja' ta yo'on ti oyuk k'uxi x-abtej ta televisione
skotol k'ak'al me sta vaxakib ora sujon xa
ta sa' bu lek xchotlebe
xlechoj jboch skajve te xvulvun sjol yo'on
tsk'el ti tsinil lek sk'u' spok' ti tsebe, sbonol satil,
stsatsal sjol xchi'uk ti oy lek skaroe.
Ja' xa ta yo'on ti vinik boch'o chlok'esat
yu'un ta mu me'on al kuxlejale.
oyuk la vu'un ka'aytike, xi xa ti sjole.
Te kejel chtajin xchi'uk ti yuni ole.

She quickly grabs the makeup,
her lips red cloth
her complexion, white and delicate.
This is no time for laments
she must rush to meet her lover
maybe have a drink, two or three
sniff the ecstasy of freedom
of knowing she's a woman.

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De prisa toma el maquillaje,
sus labios pañuelo rojo,
su tez blanca y delicada.
No hay tiempo para lamentaciones
es urgente acudir a la cita del amante
beber quizás, dos o tres tragos
aspirar por la nariz el éxtasis de la libertad
de saberse mujer.

•

Sujom stsa'k sbon satil,
tsaj lechan yanal ye kucha'al tsajal pok',
jun xa slekil xchi'uk lek xa sak li sate.
Mu xa svulvun xk'uxul yo'one
sujom xa lok'el chba sta sba xchi'uk ti svinike
lek me yuch' cha'oxbisuk pox
ta sjik' ta sni li kolemal kuxlejale
ja' ti lekil ants ta xa'isba.

Translator's Note

Enriqueta Lunez was born in the town of San Juan Chamula in the state of Chiapas, Mexico. Though born into an indigenous Tsotsil family, her parents taught her Spanish first to better integrate her into the surrounding culture. As she grew, especially influenced by the stories and songs of her grandparents, she decided to learn Tsotsil and began writing verses in that language. She was one of the few women from her community to go away to college and, when she did, a professor who read her poetry encouraged her to continue writing and translating her own verses. Sometimes she composes in Tsotsil and other times in Spanish. Like most indigenous writers, she must translate her own writing in order to share it beyond her immediate community.

In her poetry, especially the book *Ske'ej Jme'tik u/Cantos de luna/Moon Songs*, she hopes to capture snippets of her Tsotsil heritage, showing how it has been transformed by bumping up against more dominant Mexican and world cultures. For example, the first poem in the collection begins with an expression that she often hears women say in times of distress: “iChamkun, lajkun!” Though she translated this into Spanish as “iMorir, morirse!” literally ‘to die, to pass away,’ she admits that it is more accurately an idiomatic expression such as “Life sucks!”

Lunez leaves some words in Tsotsil in her Spanish translation because she wants to underscore her process here: to recycle women's own words in a new context to highlight their power. The fourth poem echoes what Chamulan women exclaim when they feel anguish or anger: “iAy, ch'ulpox!” and “iAy, ch'ul me!” (literally, “Oh, blessed liquor!” and “Oh, blessed Virgin!” respectively). “Pox” is a particular aguardiente made in Chamula. Used ritually for offerings and cures, and as protection (like an amulet), people also offer it to guests at weddings and other celebrations. Lunez observes, “It is my sense that these expressions possess a female force. Their rhythm, tone, voice, and repetition provide a window into a woman tired of resisting mistreatment by other women and, of course, men.”

The fifth poem in particular represents the way Tsotsil women are treated by their own community and the wider Mexican society. In the second verse, a passerby “spits out, Chamulita.” Enriqueta clarified that her Spanish version “tu boca dice, Chamulita” (literally “your mouth says, Chamulita”) is a common idiom that implies speaking frankly. Furthermore, the diminutive “Chamulita” is what a mestizo person would say to insult an indigenous women from Chamula. Enriqueta reclaims the word and its power to wound as the speaker shows her pride through this name in the final verses:

I am Chamulita, I tell you
listen to me,
Chamula I will die.

The next poem, beginning with the Tsotsil words “Riox totik riox,” takes this process a step further. These three words are the Tsotsil version of the Catholic holy trinity. The woman in the poem was accustomed to following the rules set forth by society, as demonstrated by her religious piety. But in the second half of the poem she defies this role, asserting her sexuality and independence. As a result of her boldness, by the last verse even the moon (the female principle in Tsotsil cosmology) has changed her face. Enriqueta commented on the poem: “Everything she does contradicts all those norms, all the rules that exist in her community and in those sacred words.” The moon (feminine in Spanish) has changed her appearance and the female poetic voice who looks up at that moon for guidance has fundamentally changed how she faces the world around her.

Though Enriqueta attempts to foreground her culture in these poems, some details have been hidden in the original text. For example, in the poem that begins “Between my legs I hide a droplet of night,” the poet explained to me that a large mole on a woman’s body known as a “tseke” is thought to predict death. This Tsotsil word for mole is also the word for scorpion. Enriqueta uses this play of imagery to tell the erotic story of a woman with three such moles whose three lovers all die. She admitted that without

a knowledge of Tsotsil etymology and beliefs, a reader would not grasp all the layers of a poem. The beautiful thing about the Señal series is that it lays out poems in trilingual form, allowing a reader to begin to make some of these connections. Enriqueta's poems take their life and breath from concrete images and the real words of people. They are not simply word games to be solved.

The remainder of the poems complicate a traditional view of indigenous women. By alluding to femicide in poem ten and by openly featuring women who are prostitutes and drug-users in the remaining poems, Enriqueta shows that there is no one way to be an indigenous woman. She admits that, at least in her own community, prostitution can empower women economically and socially. Enriqueta is not writing an essay, however, nor a political treatise. As such it is her details and quotes that give her verses the power to allow the reader to see and hear a world they wouldn't otherwise experience.

— *Clare Sullivan, June 2019*