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While you ate you told me  
you felt  
death would break your ankles in your  
youth.  
That at your funeral  
solitude would watch over  
your corpse.

Yesterday I saw the same mirror  
as always.  
There  
on that ceiling.  
I realized the void bellowed in my eardrums  
that my life was slowly crushed  
between the gray cracks  
of two walls.

So I said,  
with my habitual stubbornness,  
I would remember you.  
This memory  
as poor and sad as the humble sparrow's  
nest.  
Like the tabonuco tree,  
firm and evergreen.

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Yesterday was the Day of the Dead.
I walked by a man
who sits on the bridge
each morning
to throw little pieces of soap down the brook for his brother.

I ask myself if
his fingerprints
grazed the surface of the
river
before his lungs filled with water.

The eddies merely sweep the foam and sing along with the
orioles.

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Today I saw my son's legs  
in the blue shoes of a Syrian boy.  
I saw his hands in the miniscule gray nails  
of a drowned child.  
I wished to be born without eyes to not ache,  
to be blind to not weep.  
In me, the closest thing to blindness  
is the absence of words.

Maybe the harsh nothingness  
creeps up on its opposite,  
nausea:

This poem means nothing.

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Today was the anniversary of your mother's death.
You remembered
while you ate
farina
you called it semolina
and you told me she used to add a teaspoonful of jelly.

Later,
I scratched the texture of your freckles.
I felt the coarse hairs on your arms
the firmness of your thighs.

I touched:
Beneath your skin, muscles.
Beneath your muscles, bones.
Beneath your bones, death.

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How to understand the sudden corpse in a  
box  
illuminated by fluorescent lights?  
Is the answer in the diurnal tarpons with  
enormous mouths  
ravenous for leaves and bread?  
Perhaps in the house of the woman who lives with her  
children by the sea  
or in the dry tree trunk  
with cracks opened  
by the salt.

## Translator's Note

The author of these poems, Sabrina Ramos Rubén and I met in our graduate program in translation at the University of Puerto Rico in Río Piedras. She was already a published author and art curator at the time we ended up working together at the program's translation and research center. During this period, we developed a working professional relationship as well as a strong bond of friendship. In addition, I became familiar with and enamored by her writing. Because I have always had a particular affinity for poetry translation, when I found out Sabrina's writing had not been translated into English, I enthusiastically offered to work with her texts.<sup>1</sup>

In my process, after having read each book of poetry—*Charco hondo* and *Mangle rojo*—as well as critical reviews, I would read through the poem I planned to translate for a sense of mood and meaning. Using a combination of the *Diccionario de la lengua española* of the Real Academia Española, the *Tesoro lexicográfico del español de Puerto Rico*, and diagrams, images, and local names of Caribbean flora and fauna, I accessed the meanings missing from my personal lexicon to create an intelligible first draft. I marked ambiguities, instances of confusion, and requests for input with parentheticals, asterisks, highlights, and comments.<sup>2</sup>

Because the author and I are both Spanish-English translators, our process has been unique. We held meetings weekly or more often to revise the English translation over the phone

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1 When we worked together at the university, we would mutually edit our translations and writings. For some time, I had wanted my texts to be circulated beyond Puerto Rico. Although self-translation was always a possibility, I preferred a second set of eyes from another translator. When Yates suggested translating my poems, it seemed like a fantastic idea to me. [SRR]

2 It was interesting having to explain elements of the natural world that belong to my insular Caribbean context, which I have always taken for granted as they have formed part of the landscape I've inhabited since infancy. [SRR]

while sharing the live edits to the document. Her intimate knowledge of her own work allowed Sabrina to swiftly spot any misunderstandings, as well as suggest alternatives which were more sonorous, rhythmic, or closer in meaning to her intention. If we disagreed on a translation decision, or if an issue was not quickly elucidated, we would simply sleep on it. After continuing with the translation review and editing, Sabrina and I returned to the aspects marked in red with fresh eyes to come to a new understanding of the text.<sup>3</sup>

From my perspective, this process has been incredibly facilitated by our rapport. Our meetings felt fun and energizing, and I left each one having learned something new about language, translation, and the two of us as dynamic relational beings. We now have a working relationship as co-translators on shared personal projects and continue growing as friends, even as the Sargasso Sea spans between us.

— *S. Yates Gibson, July 2022*

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3 Given my background as an arts worker, I was accustomed to working in teams. Even still, the process of editing the translation of my texts required deeper levels of collaboration and discussion. This necessarily involved negotiation and dialogue that I had never experienced before. This was a project of great professional and individual growth, but one which also broke away from the stereotype of translation as a profession practiced in solitude. I feel that our ways of working and relating to each other are teeming with the praxis of feminist solidarity. [SRR]