

# **PURA LÓPEZ COLOMÉ**

**FROM SPEAKING IN SONG (HEARING AND FORGETTING)**

**TRANSLATED BY DAN BELLM**

**FROM LITANY IN THE GARDEN**  
**WITH MUSIC BY ALEJANDRO FOLGAROLAS**

***I. Loquat***

I gather that in certain lands (the ones that can be spied from the sea) it's considered a useless fruit, made to be thrown to the compost, too little flesh, too large a pit, rachitic fruity thing you'd only feed an animal. But a voice on the breeze answers, don't say that: if you spy such a delicate thing, the kind of aroma you could bite into that lasts only a moment, and if you dawdle and hesitate, the birds will win and get there first, and carpet the ground with the seeds, and that's why they sing so divinely, a pleasure if you've never thought in such circumlocution. The ones, anyway, that have the color of a flower. Oval color, hairless skin. Some would go so far as to call it astringent to the palate, meant only for the levantine shores of Spain, though the name of it came from Japan. It grows here. Here's where I came to know it. I took off its fuzz for fear it would scratch the throats of fascinated children. I've always wanted to use it for something I don't know how to make and never will, like marmalades or jellies, very simple but dangerous because all at once it might bring childhood back. I'd die of happiness. Once again I'd feel little creatures run through my veins, I'd see them again without fear. Which is to say:

In certain lands  
that can be seen  
by spyglass  
from the sea,  
it's a fruit  
without much of a use,  
made to return to the compost,  
with too little flesh  
and too large a stone,  
a body that offers itself  
in reverential fear,  
devotes itself in marriage  
to the animals,

the fierce or  
the merely hungry beasts.  
They're about to come  
hailing down,  
answers a voice  
on the breeze:  
if you mean delicate things,  
the kind of aroma you could bite into  
that lasts only a moment,  
no bird could overtake you  
or get there first,  
or carpet the seedy earth  
with little pits  
like pupils of a lynx:  
everything that glitters is gold.  
Instead,  
one breeze to the next,  
there are oval colors  
with hairless skin.  
There will always be someone  
to scorn  
and denounce it, call it  
the very definition  
of astringent,  
insult it in music,  
lowlife loquat,  
meant only for levantine lands,  
strange essence from great distance.  
Between bursts of laughter  
we all live together in  
the infancy of spit,  
in the roofs of our mouths.

Not to jump for joy  
but to die overwhelmed by it,  
for one supreme moment  
to see little liquid creatures  
come running again,  
this time without fear.

### III. *Avocado*

So ordinary that it was only a matter of going out to pick what was hanging from the branches, first as a treat for the one at the head of the table and then for the others. So hard to tell whether it was fruit or vegetable. So unappreciated by the little ones, so heavenly for all the rest. So abundant that you and I used to use them to play-fight, and I nearly put your eye out with one that was not just green but unripe. As green as the envy of anyone who'd dare define the *Tristes Tropiques*. So unmovable from its yard. So gloomily present in that 1940s house, the one I always desired as something deserved, really mine since childhood. That made me stumble over my own identity. I began to harbor the suspicion that desires are only fulfilled by way of tortuous paths, unfathomed and mysterious. That place that the strongest earthquake in history failed even to jostle. The walls swayed as if made of chewing gum or rubber, and even if they were made of concrete nothing cracked, nothing split apart: nothing. A mermaid fell from on high into your hands and sang, that 19<sup>th</sup> of September. And so the floors of Italian marble, the leaded windows, the spiral stairs, the wrought iron, the gargoyles all shook. And the avocado tree, passing like water through my house and heart, like ivory statues, like pillars of silver and gold, flourishing out on the terrace where we'd go to take the air. Because the weather there was something all its own: noise did not exist; the clouds were white-haired old women of legend over a childhood sky; the water from the tap was blessed. Which is to say:

A mermaid fell  
from on high  
into your hands.

She sang  
the hour,  
the day,  
the month,  
the year.

Everything shook.  
The windows shattered.

Bits of cloud  
that turned to water  
from Lourdes.

## **Kaleidoscope,**

indifferent

in every sense of the word  
to the sacred changing past,  
the handicapped present,  
the pliable so-called future  
of many faces,  
watered petals,  
*disjecta membra*  
(just now I was holding it  
between my hands)

See up closer now,  
sad binocular, monocle, eyepiece, loupe,  
contact lens, hand mirror, framed or not,  
window to strain or run visions  
and hallucinations through  
(I remember a letter)  
(I remember insults written by hand)

## **facing dry remains**

when I return for you,  
dotting every i,  
plotting the path

*and what do I have left*

tottering like an automaton I went,  
no one blocking my way in,  
no one looming like a watchman

of the catacombs,  
pale grey the labyrinth  
announced itself,  
opening its cave mouth:  
corridors upon corridors  
lit up  
at the touch of a fingertip or nail,  
urging me not  
to retreat one inch,  
to become a fugitive  
as quickly as I could.



## The Soul to the Body

*To L., beyond*

When I managed to lower  
the normal volume,  
which was itself  
too much,  
a loudspeaker  
turned the wrong way  
panted out,  
hanging from  
a scaffold  
by a thread:

“Continue on your way,  
*compañera*,  
owner  
even of my gloating  
on others’ misfortunes”—  
and since this was not enough,  
I raised your eyebrows  
as you lay dying,  
peeled back your eyes,  
so beautiful,  
their burst blood vessels  
still brimming with my image,  
and I insisted,

“We’ll meet again, beyond.”

And if that wasn’t enough,  
I wanted to make

still one more request of you,  
*postscriptum*,  
one more last hope,  
*timor mortis*:

“Wait for me, don’t change,  
I’ll be there soon,  
I’ll reach you in one breath,  
I swear.”

My throat closed up  
when I closed yours.

\*

Today I’ve let the wind stir  
your colors one by one  
in a circle over what remains,  
making a pinwheel of your ashes,  
scattering them with the greatest care  
into the womb,  
into the root  
of the ravine.

“Don’t hem me in,”  
I shouted at you once  
between a rock and a hard place,  
threatened  
by your deep kindness,  
by your gentleness as you drew near  
when by rights you should have hurt me,  
sunk fangs in me

for daring to interfere  
in what was none of my affair,  
to raise my voice to you,  
to be who I am.

Maybe I'll have to settle for  
letting out a howl of supplication  
if there is one  
in the pit of my chest,  
strange password.  
And by imitating you,  
make  
the body  
a soul again.  
Return them  
to each other.