

The Woods

That's what we called the brush field
triangular lot thick with thorns & thistles
between our house & Frío City Road

But high in the cloudless days of summer
we hung on the muscular arms of mesquite
hurtling our thin brown limbs from branch
to branch Sinbad's sailors scoping the seven
seas from wind blasted crows' nests

After thunderstorms the woods grew dense & daunting
habitat of *lechuzas* & other furry feathered things
Wild grass blades dripping beads of rain
Old toads grumbling incantations
in a language dark & deep as earth
Their croaking chorus lulling us to sleep
Fireflies dotting the expansive arc of night
with their little endless scribblings

One day after school
we found the massive trees
in tangled mounds of twisted limbs
Bulldozers dragging the fallen giants
Palms raised hopelessly
feeling for our helpless hands
Finding only iron claws
scraping hardened earth
in a violent wreck of roots

Desiccated branches lay in heaps for weeks
We bent and fashioned a makeshift hut
of twigs & brushwood
Inaugurating a secret hide out
where we could burn hot dogs and ransack
unopened packs of *Kools* or *Lucky Strikes*
Peeling back the cellophane wraps
Dragging on the menthol filter tips all spark & cool
Watching the trail of blue ribboned smoke rise like hazy hopes
until the smothering fumes forced us back out
into a felled forest of blackened truncated torsos
Talking late into the cavernous gloom
Remembering the night Officer Canales
was gunned down chasing a robbery suspect
on Frío City Road how we stole out

to see his cruiser idling in the middle of the two lane
Porch lights flicking on like the Kelly Field runway
Mothers calling kids back in
threatening with belts and curses
Neighbors trying to make sense
Squad cars spraying the dark with their flashing strobes
tearing up the alleys for the killer
who would live another day

Laughing at the time a train load of cattle capered
from their boxcar prison hoofing down our street
A mean white charging bull huffing & hooking air
& what might stand in his way
Albert & I taunting this way & that
dodging the herd rumbling toward freedom
Desperate cowboys in pursuit
on high horses cutting cattle left and right
—a taste of the Wild West on our front yards

Rapping how Hurricane Carla ripped
through our area our own 9/11
Winds over 100 miles per hour
uprooting aged trees like prickly weeds
Frío City Road flooded
Mud & gravel colliding in a swirling chocolate mass
Heavy machine gun rain pounding the house like artillery rounds
Amá lighting candles hurriedly covering mirrors
with white sheets praying to the *santos* she knew
would listen to her pleas
Trapped in a tidal wave of wind & water

Remembering JFK—a loss we would never comprehend
Injecting our veins with rock & roll to fill the empty spaces
Tripping to *black magic woman light my fire*
Getting no *satisfaction*
Looking for a philosophic stone to hone our blades
Found what we needed on the street
Souls on fire
The dream in flames
Unaware of the uncertainty dangling
over us like a sword
Ahead—the boundless fuddled future

As we swung from the corner
Calaveras Street sign
in tattered jeans

grungy tees
beat-up Beatle boots
Filterless *Camels* balanced on our lips
Mean & jaded
A dagger glare
An empty lot