

*Janet Arelis Quezada*



## tengo una pena en el alma

---

each word bitten down  
until the sweet tastes like fibrous grit  
and chokes on the way down  
but maybe you'll forget  
each scream between sex and death  
between joy and a growl  
maybe you'll forget the sound  
baptized herself with names  
la yiyiyi  
you'll forget the sound of her voice

ay mi yi yis

motown funk and august in harlem, detroit, philly  
the steps and porches sag under feet, pat, pat  
oye mami, I can't understand what you're sayin'  
but I sure do like the beat  
boogaloo

doo-wop molasses over goat-skin taut with moans  
molondrones called okra  
grits called maicena  
the peanut vendor empieza su pregón y ya se va

cuando más pude quererte sin deternete te dije adios

she was an addict to the music and the drugs  
mascara round her eyes like freshly laid tar  
voice went down our throats like miel de abeja  
with a sting

a self-proclaimed bad girl  
the weighted chemistry unglued her wigs  
she threw them at the cameras with her shoes  
explosive dribble off her lips

tengo una pena en el alma

producers called it salsa  
careful cover over campo grass,  
blood-stained sugarcane and slavery in the islands  
the liner notes don't list the band

we cannot trace the history of the trombones  
the hands that made the long yells  
that we heard when tias put their hands on hips  
and demanded "y dónde estabas tú?"

oye papi, y cómo te llamas tú en el tumbao

we string together names of the dead  
and pass our tongues over  
hector, la lupe  
one name for those dead in vietnam  
on the streets, in apartments with no heat  
from unknowns like winter,  
or the hard cages where they put colorful creatures

porque yo tengo una pena en el alma

