

Ladies, all the ladies, all the ladies

(in the house)



Hope
is prayer is a cheap photograph, a
fuzzy picture
the kind that lightens
skin so all the ladies,
all the round-the-way
girls line up.

Hoochies strike car-show pose
Cholas shave off their
eyebrows and line their lips black,
baby mamas and daddies
fix eyes on the camera,
knowing nothing lasts forever.

The backdrops are
softened butterflies
against dark colors
or airbrushed starbursts
like a Halo around
Ani's head.

She looks like a ghetto
Madonna and Child,
Our Lady of Poverty and
the Mean Streets
Bendita sea.

She used to cover
her face with her
hands when I would
read to her about a
girl like her,
wincing,
because I would say
words like
Infibulation she-
(out of all of them, the
vida loca quinceñeras, the
3rd generation social services hostages,
the fallen-through-the-cracks
illiterate adolescent balls of fire)-she
knew what a word
like that means
to a girls body,
how each syllable is a cut,
a hand over her mouth,
a stitch of thread through
swollen flesh,
and her mother knew,
and *her* mother know,
it's why she's *here*.

Seventeen years old,
she prayed for a boy
she corn-rowed her hair
and waited.
She waited for a son,
Having no father,
Being herself a holy spirit.

Rocío



Her photograph is like
a retablo
I want to put it on a wall and light
her a candle
Dios te salve, beautiful girl,
mouth full of angry words
hand in a fist.
Blessed art thou
among women.

I see her gift,
and it is not this son
I see her gift.
and I am alarmed.
It is like seeing
dynamite strapped to
the chest of a stranger
in a crowded hallway.
I want to tackle
her and save her
and save everybody.

Her eyes stare back
with the gaze a wild
bird held captive,
determined to kill
if she must.
She looks at me with
contempt and I try
to breathe normally,
blinded by the
flame in her chest.

In a place like this,
no one would believe what I saw,
she does not believe it.
She bites my hand as I
try to feed her, as I
try to keep her
from starving,
from dying this way.

In a place like this,
everyone carries
wallet size portraits like
prayer cards,
pictures taken as if
in a fog,
a dream, something
outside of this reality,
this
tribe of wild girls and their babies,
too tough for a
three-story building.

Carlos



Rocío Carlos is a poet and educator. Born and raised in South / East Los Angeles, Carlos addresses biculturalism, transition and human rights issues in her work. She is currently working on a collection of conversations between La Llorona and the daughter she drowned, entitled Hija Ahogada.