

**ELENA SALAMANCA
WRITING SAMPLE**

**ON THE MYTH OF SANTA TECLA
[From *Peces en la Boca* (2011)]
by ELENA SALAMANCA
trans. J GAN & RYAN GREENE**

ON THE MYTH OF SANTA TECLA

A man will ask for my hand
and I will cut it off.
Another will grow
and I will cut it off again.

The man will think:
what a perfect woman, she is a tree of hands:
she'll be able to milk the goats,
make cheese,
cook the chickpeas,
get water from the river,
make my underclothes.

But I will keep cutting off my hands
when he says:
Woman, I've asked for your hand,
and you must milk the goats.
Woman, you are mine,
bring water from the river,
serve the cheese,
go into town for wine.

My hands will fall like flowers fall
and they will roam the fields,
stubborn:
They will not milk the goats,
nor go into town for wine,
they won't ever mend his underwear,
and never,
much less,
will they cradle his testicles.

The man will say:
What a wicked woman,
she is a curse of hands.

He will get a hatchet,
and cut off my arms.
New ones will be born.
Then he will think
that the origin of life is found in the navel
and will cut my body in two.

My thousands of cut hands
will turn blue
and will move.
They will dry the wheat,
will play with the water,
will dry the river,
will uproot the pasture,
will poison the goats,
the cheese.

And the man will think:
What an awful curse:
it must be forbidden to ask the hand of a woman with a will.

**Fragments of *Monsters Maybe/Tal vez monstruos* (Mouthfeel Press, Texas, 2022).
By Elena Salamanca
Trans. by Ryan Greene**



PART I

Unstable valley,
fugitive,
like a fish from the depths
who's emerged into the light
and fears seeing
for the first time.

Trembling valley,
convulsed
like one who's received their draft card,
like one who doesn't want to die.

You take me by the hand
and you let me go:
with your eyes wrapped
playing blind man's bluff
in the labyrinth of History.

I touch:
Springy mosses.
They must be green
like the first fire,
austral fire.

Life doesn't come from seed
but from bacteria:
velvet bacteria gathered into a colony
on a rock.
That ancient stone:
asteroid or volcanic vestige.

I taste:
"everything was murmurous and tasted like sugar."
Even if there's no sweet or bitter:
nor the men whose
backs are burnt in the zafra,
or in the cotton fields,

gathering a soft white red-spined flower;
and there aren't the women who rust their hands
amid poisoned tomatoes
or strawberry fields.

I smell:
Chocolate.
Dark stain which was once seed or coin.
Aroma between sheets of paper,
a gift, a poem.
I wrote a book, I don't know.
Nor do I know who killed you.

But I know where it happened:



Flame of asters,
petals which,
fractal,
were geometry
before flower.

Green is the lava,
that color which consumes fire,
the seed which exploded mid-air
burned by the violence.

Bromeliads which won't be
bromeliads.
Tillandsias which floated
against the law of gravity,
airborne flowers,
because the surface didn't exist.

And the spirit of the universe moved over the waters
and it wasn't fish
nor trilobite.

Amaranths with hairs and tentacles.
Flowers which could have had fins
and not petals.

Monsters maybe.

EGGS

[from *La familia o el olvido/Family or Oblivion (2017)*] Bilingual edition,
Editorial Kalina.

by ELENA SALAMANCA

trans. Alexandra Lytton Regalado

EGGS

A multitude of women drag me, push me, squeeze me. Women with children in arms, women with thousands of arms, women with their armpits on my head, the teeth of their children pull at me, the smell of milk, exposed breasts, the children eating, clinging to the meaty nipples of their mothers. The multitude pushes, and I'm not sure if the eggs I bought are still intact, I'm not sure if they've broken, I'm not sure if these eggs have incubated amidst the heat of old women and armpits. I don't know what it is the women are screaming, they say things to me. I'm taking care of my eggs, I hold them close to my chest, I wrap my arms around the bag, and I scream that I do not want anything, that I don't have a purse, I must've lost it, it must've been stolen, you can't trust anyone anymore. I don't want them to sell me any more bunches of herbs to make soup, to make love, to be rid of people, to say goodbye; herbs planted along the way, ripped out by the teeth of poor women. I don't want them to offer me endless spools of thread to darn socks, to sew buttons on shirts, shut them out—I hate sewing on buttons! I don't know what it is they're asking me to buy; I won't buy it. I've lost my purse, it's been taken, it's been robbed, it's been thrown away, I lost it, I don't know anymore, you can't trust anybody anymore.

The women scream at me:

-You need, love?

-I don't have any, heart.

-You need love?

-I don't have any heart.

I don't know if these eggs have incubated and I'm carrying countless of underfed chickens in the bag; I don't know if one of those chicks will break its shell, will poke out its beak, will peck out my eye, will peck out the eye of the women and children that drag me and push me. It would be good if a couple of eyeless women changed direction, if they got lost, crashed against each other, crashed against the city, and left the path clear for me to get home, to prepare dinner: two eggs, two miniscule sacrificed chickens; to serve them on your plate, to serve them on the table, to sit, to rip the little legs off the puniest chickens, to find the wishbone, to fight for it; hopefully each of us will end up with the longest bone and we will have eternal luck and we can ask for something good, if only for this one time at our table, something good just once in this house, something good just once in this city.

BLOOD

[from *La familia o el olvido/ Family or Oblivion (2017)*] Bilingual edition,
Editorial Kalina.

by ELENA SALAMANCA

trans. Alexandra Lytton Regalado

BLOOD

In this city built to live without emotion, only what can be butchered has value. The smell of blood. The blood of the dead. There are some that have never smelled a body. Not yet. Like her. The generals, despite being murderers, never got stained with blood. That's what vexed her. In a war someone was always killed. And heroes, such as generals, killed, if not thousands, then many, like the heroes of a tragedy, as in the battles she read about in Books.

But in this country the generals were immaculate as virgins, like the miracle-worker virgin of holy stamps found at market stalls. Only lightly spattered, poised above the meat stall of the city's open-air market.

Once again, the smell of blood.

The smell of freshly-chopped chicken feet.

The smell of the cleaved wings of a hen.

The smell of cow entrails.

The smell of a pig's severed head.

She pulled some bills out of her purse and handed them over to the meat vendor. The meat vendor received them, said thanks, gave her blessing and offered a compliment. She wrapped the feet, the wings, the innards in newsprint, folded it into a package tied with rope, and topped with a bow like a sweet gift.

-Here you go, she smiled.

The girl said thanks and nothing more.

Not one compliment, not one blessing for that rotting marketplace, for that obese woman with her hands full of blood, clotted gobs, and hearts.

She exited the market, carefully negotiating the terrain as one does to avoid stepping on shit, lettuce leaves, the gut-smears of tomatoes red as the hearts of saints that decorate the market stalls of this city.

And she walked into the city.

As she crossed the streets, all the women blessing and sweettalking the shoppers; all of the women, old and arthritic, young and pregnant, with dyed hair, wearing colorful aprons, with powerful underarms, women who recently gave birth, women who have sold things all of their lives in the same corner of the city. That city darkened by the smog of buses; buses filled with people who have their noses stuffed with smog and blood.

All this blood for a soup—she tightened her hold on the package of viscera.

All this blood for a city.

THE BIRDS

[from *La familia o el olvido/Family or Oblivion (2017)*] Bilingual edition,
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by ELENA SALAMANCA

trans. Alexandra Lytton Regalado

Two women enter a café. They carry a cage. They sit, ask for the menu, place their orders: bread, coffee, and sugar. One is old, the other young. The young woman takes the bread and hands it to the older woman. The old woman breaks it into crumbs on her plate; she opens the cage, sprinkles it and asks:

-Did we already pay for the bread?

-Yes, we paid.

-How many rolls did we buy?

-Three.

-The refrigerator is filling up with ice.

-It will defrost.

-Have all the leaves fallen from the tree in the yard?

-They've fallen.

-Who will rake them?

-Someone will rake the yard.

-Eating yet?

-Yes, the bird is eating.

-No, no, the girl... Has she eaten yet?

The girl is a cloud trail in the blind eyes of the old woman. The girl never existed, or she grew up long ago. The girl died or she left, no one knows, and they were left with the birds.

They filled their house with birdcages; they left them open and let the birds roam the house like guests. The birds slept in their shoes and defecated on the porcelain figurines the way pigeons defecate on statues of heroes in plazas. When the women went out, they carried the birds in their purses, they clung to their chests like brooches, the birds climbed up their clothes until they installed themselves on their heads.

People would say, -Nice hats, ladies.

Nice hats that fly with the wind and don't come back like the hats children lose when they are not tied to their heads, they float away into the vastness like the balloons of children in the park, like birds escaping from a cage.

The birds sang when they took flight and the women, with tears in their eyes, waved goodbye.

*Goodbye, bird,
goodbye.*

The house was full of feathers and shit, eggshells and shit; the birds left a thin layer of shit on the teacups and tables the way pigeons shit all over the heroes and nations, on memory and oblivion.

And they decided to go out.

The waiter approaches with another basket of bread. He places two more rolls on the table. The women crumble the bread. One two three five eighteen twenty breadcrumbs. The waiter asks if it isn't dangerous to keep the cage open.

No.

It's not dangerous.

Flight began with a fall. Life began with wings dashing against stone, with an avalanche, lava and mud, downhill, with a bird that couldn't take off. The first birds had scales and never flew; all beginnings start with an ending.

People eating their bread and drinking their coffee look at the table with the two women. They hear a bird singing very high, as if one hundred different birds were singing, as if the café were really a birdhouse. People stop eating; the waiter approaches with more coffee and he trips over the long legs of the clientele. They flap their arms in a clamor and he falls with his tray full of bread and cups.

The women can't hear the bird.

They crumble the bread.

They never ever heard the birds.

They lost them.

The clients chirrup and cluck at their breadcrumbs; beaks jut from their mouths, feathers fan from their underarms, tails poke out from beneath their skirts. The waiter hears their chirps and clacks, how they slap their wings on the bars, at dusk, at the exact moment two women enter the café with a cage.

Empty.

LANDSMODER**By Elena Salamanca****Trans. by Ryan Greene****From *Landsmoder* (Not A Cult, Los Angeles, 2022). Bilingual edition*****Kneeling******all my life before the virgin and the flag,***

I grew some strong knees
to uphold my fatherland.

All the earth's fungi bloomed from the scabs on my knees.

On my knees before the virgin and the flag, I prayed and I sang.

My knees grew until they sent out roots,
until they were tree,
wood,
table,
bed,
crutch,
lectern.

That buttress of boys who died and were converted into heroes and saints,
into hero-saints.

All the earth's fruits grew around me.

They fell to the ground and others were born.

I had wheat,
I had flour,
I had bread.

I was hungry.

And I didn't take a single bite.