

Martha Cecilia Ruiz

**Neither zika nor dengue nor chikun**

Her hand flew past her ear. She thought she'd heard a buzzing sound. It had been rainy lately; perhaps a mosquito bite was to blame for the itch on her back, just above her shoulder blades.

She stepped out of the kitchen for a second, looked for a coat hanger, and leisurely scratched herself. She then found some rubbing alcohol and applied it as best she could.

Her smile faded as she remembered the plagues—zika, dengue, and chikungunya. The mother's words, the priest's sentence, the responsibility of motherhood, and the neighbors' whispers.

She tried to calm down, ground herself, take deep breaths, and become reconciled with her reality, as she had been told.

But fate is inescapable. There was nothing her husband could do anymore. These were newly-sprouted wings, reborn.

**A December paeon for young ladies and their ever-ardent suitors**

My chest hurts—said the woman in bed.

Why don't you try being normal—said the man before turning his back on her.

Realizing the hour drew near, she opened her chest and pulled out, one by one, her sorrows. She made space for them in the shoe rack and arranged them in a row. Who if not a good wife knows to leave everything in order, even her woes.

Her husband interrupted her. —I'm thirsty—he said. She handed him a glass of water. He drank it all and pretended to sleep.

The woman returned to her chores. Out of her open breastbone she pulled out a few knives, a sawfish, and two or three shark teeth. — It's because I'm Nicaraguan—she justified herself before the Angel of Death.

Filtered by her lungs, gushes of blood came pouring out of her open chest. Her blood was the kind that was best described as tart, like a green mango, and thin, like the water that's left after you've rinsed the rice. She thought this was especially true of the blood that flowed out of her nipples, her vagina, and even the nails on her sad hands. When he woke up, the widow complained about the stained sheets. He was angry; there was no one left to wash them.

**A short story: Kasumi and Kazumi**

My dear Inspector D.,

I was never sure if I should thank you or scold you for taking me with no warning to the morgue, for placing me in front of a corpse lying on a metallic table, enveloped by brimming buckets, papers, and the cold, for making me wait for the recorder to switch on and for your questions to pour out while I kept my stomach in check, [for putting me] before that dead girl, that murdered girl.

I remember the weeds that had sprouted through the concrete of the hospital parking lot, the dirty halls, and the funeral home's sales rep, brochure in hand, as he lurked in front of the Intensive Care Unit and stalked women and youths who in a few hours would become widows and orphans. I felt ashamed for him, for us, for all of us who circle the dead.

I watched you as you brazenly asked your questions and did your daily rounds; meanwhile, Kasumi hounded me, feeding me details about what had befallen her and voicing her opinion about what would happen between us later.

What would you have thought if I had told you then that, from the very start, Kasumi had given me every clue you believed was the product of my intuition or a revelation by a source I refused to reveal? I had the best source, really: Kasumi herself. She was my age, my height, so similar to me. Her name was the key to everything that happened next. When the director of the morgue said *unidentified female body, approximately twenty years old*, I heard: *My name is Kasumi Anduray Baldizón; I'm twenty-one years old.*

She told me her father had named her Kasumi after a character from a comic, a warrior who protects her family in times of feudal wars, but who, in the end, takes her own life after she is ordered to surrender her weapons and become a lady of the court.

*Don't you think it's ironic? I refused to see it; that's why I never gave him the note asking him to stay away. But I knew he would kill me*, she told me. I'd like to know if my name had anything to do with it. What would have happened if I had a different name? What if I had killed him? Would you like to be named Kasumi?

If I had told you, I would have risked what I considered the most important thing in the world: Being by your side, learning from the best. At first, I felt badgered by the two of you, Kasumi and you, but she gave me an edge. An outsider probably would have thought those were my glory days—recruited into the elite team before finishing college!

Kasumi spoke to me, and everything she said made sense. *Have them look in my bag; there's a hidden zipper under the seam.* It was there she put the note asking her ex-boyfriend to leave her alone, stop threatening her, and leave her be once and for all. She didn't have time to give him the note, but that piece of paper proved to be crucial in catching the murderer.

I didn't want to tell you about the dead girl that whispered in my ear. I just said I'd discovered the hidden compartment in her bag because I had one just like it. You took all the credit, handled the press conference, posed for all the pictures. You proclaimed it had been your

instinct, your investigative experience—which you used to boast about so much—that led you to the murderer. To you, this was just another case, solved in a few weeks. For me, it was the beginning of two years filled with dread, trapped by the mind games you used to manipulate my body and my mind.

It's bizarre that this morning, as I sat down to write the speech I will deliver at my promotion ceremony, I thought about you and felt no anxiety. It was then I decided to write you this email, which you will never read.

I wrote to my first lover and rival, the one who brought me closer to the pale lips of that dead girl who would talk to me at all hours, the same one that exposed me to the cold and desolation of her naked, exsanguinated body, the one who sometimes came to my bed. You made me realize that you took me to the morgue because you fantasized about having me on my back, naked. I was an offering that you, as the sacrificial officiant, split open and bled to death.

Kasumi always told me the truth. She warned me and still I stumbled. I offered myself to you, and I submitted to all your tests and punishments—until that morning. Then everything changed. She was the reason I pretended to be sick and didn't go with you on what would be your last mission. Three days later, I was the one who identified your naked body in a makeshift morgue up north. There you were, with your chest open, drained of blood. You seemed skinnier and more interesting than you actually had been. I wasn't sad until several days later, when I realized Kasumi had left for good.

In peace, I say goodbye,

Kazumi

*Kasumi: A Japanese word that means "fog."*

*Kazumi: A Japanese feminine name that means "beautiful hope."*

from the poetry collection *En los Raudales de mi cuerpo*

### **Why I don't mourn you**

Truly I could fall into depression,  
curl up within my insides,  
mourn you as I lie in a thousand pieces,  
collect futile attempts at self-pity,  
despise what you almost were once,  
knife myself with your scent,  
stockpile days and nights  
while depriving my body and soul of water  
with my nails dug into the pavement  
and my lips swollen with frustrations,

but I can't:

My tears would ruin my make-up,  
and  
besides  
I don't have time.

**In the turbulent streams of my body**

*For Christian Santos, as I remember his story*

You descended into the turbulent streams of my body  
you drank rainwater from the hands of the river  
you camped on my island of singing birds  
and you heard nothing.

I sang you to sleep with wind and waves  
while you despoiled paradise with spear and cane.

Blood stains arrive from the lake,  
On the sand, a fish woman cries with dry eyes  
Tear your boat's sails, she tells me.

And here I am,  
I'm done being a fish, a *pepesca*, a *chuluca*

And with every stroke of the oar, I take back my life.

**Self-portrait 2**

A body has gone missing,  
silken and soft  
very small and sweet like a bird.

But I'm not looking for it  
because I have a different one,  
sober, life-giving,  
ardent and audacious,  
which grows as large with pounds as it does with love.

From the Poetry collection *Poemas de Jardín*

*And I dreamt I was a tree*

Claribel Alegría

**There are gardens on the rooftops**

Behind the fog  
some nineteen hundred clandestine orchids  
escape the violence  
of the smuggler, the trafficker,  
who uses wooden crates  
to trap flowers, women, and girls.



**Garden Club No. 2**

An old woman's translucent hand escapes through the window; her  
fingers grasp the branch of a lemon tree;  
she bites a leaf and a tingling sensation settles in her mouth.

A tremor in her tongue—like a stolen kiss—  
    an instant  
        and she appears to be alive.

**My garden sings**

My backyard is magnificent;  
it decks itself out in the concrete of its fountain.  
In its smallness, it has never seen the Bocay or Wangki Rivers  
or Pear Lagoon, but its greatness is evident.

It knows nothing of the jungles that drink from the sky,  
where turtles kiss manatees,  
and fish sleep with eyes filled with light

It's happy in its innocence;  
[my garden,] which contains everyone and itself,  
celebrates and sings:

"I am the Walt Whitman of gardens."

from the Poetry collection *Al Caer la tarde*

**11.**

Like the chaff that the wind blows away,  
that's how I remember you.  
As evening falls, I open the windows;  
I recognize myself.  
I'm the one who mastered fire,  
and in the ashes, I read myself

Freedom.

*Translated from the Spanish by Camilla Torres Carrillo*