

**By José Faus**

José Calderon Supposes

On the fiftieth year of his life  
José Calderon buys a set  
of black moleskin notebooks  
a quill relic pen  
and a set of professional  
calligraphy inks

He climbs the three sets of stairs  
to the attic newly converted  
into a writing garret

He sits at the desk near the open window  
facing out onto the street below  
and dutifully removes the plastic foil  
from the pack of notebooks  
He arranges them on the sparse desk  
opens the first page and creases it back  
laying it flat on the table top  
He dips the quill into the inkwell  
and sets about to write  
the profound arc of his life

Twenty minutes later  
the ink dried on the nib of the pen  
he moves away from profundity  
and searches the significant achievements  
that are his life's narrative

An hour later  
he ponders the absurd moments  
that surely fill his fifty years

Two hours later  
he watches the dogs  
chase their tails in the neighbor's yard  
watches the squirrels jump into the streets  
and at the slightest sound freeze and  
turn in stutters before returning where they began  
or proceeding to where they meant to go

He watches the play  
of hundreds of swifts

diving off the power lines  
marvels at the well played dance  
of dips swoops and plunges  
the orchestrated sudden stops and turns  
a set of convulsing elastic bands  
stretching and pulling away from a center  
and springing back only to pull away again

An hour later he opens his eyes  
and lifts his head from  
the sweater covered arm  
that has become his rest  
He feels the webbing of the sweater  
etched across his face  
and sees the sun in its last descent  
He looks at the blank pages  
and begins to write  
Seconds later the quill on its rest  
he rises abruptly from the desk  
walks to the door steps out  
and closes it behind him

In the room on the desk  
across the top of the page  
a name written clearly  
in block letters fades  
in the dim evening light

## Malvern Hill

The branches have dropped to the ground  
heavy with the cold rain's bracelets

The stalls are closed  
The wind whistles through the trestles  
still in need of a fresh coat of paint  
The hands that fumbled at the table  
with the bread crumbs in her fingers  
have disappeared

When I last saw her  
she was riding a horse bareback  
hard into the wind and the night

There goes a girl  
with a particular affliction  
She sleeps hard upon the pillows

I slough off to the only bed I know  
the only familiar that wakens me

I  
am not the I  
not the I  
that you would think

I  
gather up the straw that falls about  
and make whole a man with no reflection

I  
set out to see the yesterdays  
that passed me by  
through the smoke  
burning in the eyes  
through the pages  
littered on the floor  
the messages not read  
the calls not returned  
the letters not sent  
or written  
or thought upon

or the ashtrays  
overflowing on the dusty sill

And the door  
that constant creak that sounds  
only when I leave and enter  
And the rug worn and bare  
to the splintered floor  
And the many layers of paint  
fallen to the ground  
among the papers that pile up  
with the sameness of the toss  
and the sameness  
of the letters and the words

I am I  
at the border  
I  
at the sides  
I  
at the rail  
like a guilty witness to a murder

My death  
a silent falling down  
down to the crushing  
bending of the legs  
and the stiffness of the joints  
cramped and crimped  
till useless to the neighbors

I carry myself like a gentle man  
with my white flowing hair  
my face hard into the wind  
disdainful of a cane  
not a crutch to anyone  
no help to anyone

No one waits for me  
and I wait for no one

Except for her  
that girl that fell  
down the dried river bed  
as she careened past the summer stalls  
and gathered all the color

swept some into the folds of her apron  
and tucked the rest neatly in her bonnet

She fell down into a hole  
Her rose drawn cheeks  
fixed their eyes on me  
She yelled  
help me please  
you there  
a crutch to no one  
no help to anyone

I saw her fall  
and no one came for her

I went no further  
than the startled rush  
of feathers in a swamp  
at the falling of a pebble  
into a shallow cove

I saw the crime and did not report it  
Who would listen and to what would I relate  
a girl tumbling rolling with summer stuffed  
into a picnic basket and a pomegranate  
in her hand

I know where she rests  
but I will not go there  
I am not a master of the arts  
I am a blessed observer  
and a quiet one at that

## Ten Days Now Without Rest

A bandoneon  
a freeze-up tango  
A sparse bar  
an early night in Buenos Aires  
A dark haired girl swoons to the ground  
A second from the floor a pull from a young hand  
A stiff turn and exit via the kitchen to mild applause

In the chairs an old couple waits patient  
as the waiter pours the wine he says to me  
Just wait the older ones do it so much better

I drink until the bottles are all one  
and memories rush over me as they wait their turn

A woman answers the door in heels and a black lace gown  
while Sinatra plays in the dark  
A lover calls out her name as she laughs at a boy  
selling door to door  
brooms for the blind

An old preacher and his wife invite me for dinner  
put the White Album on the stereo box  
This is the best one they have ever made he tells me  
as his dear wife becomes familiar  
with the growing bulge above my knees

A girl sways easy on a bed to Kind of Blue  
Ooh baby how you keep the mood with that tune

A girl on a beach in Brazil sends me a kiss  
in the Noname bar in Ermopouli  
She says your girlfriend is very beautiful  
I say yours is too and we toast them both  
while a turntable spins Getz on an island  
a Homeric night between evening and dawn

In the mirrors she dances a freakish Scheherazade  
skipping like a bouncing ball of yarn  
Another story of long nights in the corner of booths  
in dim lit bars and quarters stacked on the table  
Take them play any song you want

I got nothing but quarters tonight  
and cigarettes sheets of paper and well oiled pens  
I was in the corps at City Ballet she says to me  
and now it is Doctor Feelgood and Fever  
She sways her hips to the clang of glasses  
never quite empty never quite full  
the price of admission high  
the cost of attention prohibitive  
No one notices as she does her last encore  
in the back of a beat up jeep  
and she takes me back  
to chancel choir and Gregorian chants  
and the penance for one bad note  
sang too many times

He takes her hand and moves across the weathered floor  
while she closes her eyes and though he leads  
she goes where she wants to go  
At the kitchen door the young girl bites her lips  
Her partner sips a drink and smirks  
Until a jab to his side from her elbow  
Turns him to see the tear that slides down her cheek

And somewhere in Santelmo  
between the evening and dawn  
an old couple and Gardel  
prove the waiter right  
The older ones do it so much better

## They Call Me Butterfly Because of My Tattoo But My Real Name is Jenny

The call of the street is louder than the pain at her side  
She yells and doubles down crumples on the ground  
Wait for me wait come back here  
The other responds not bothering to look back  
What the hell are you doing get out of the fucking street  
The words fall to the side where hands hold her ribs  
My man kicked me so hard I was in ICU for three days  
I want to yell at her  
What is the point of being here where none care for you  
Take your wings mariposa  
Take them back to that house across the street  
Take them to that house there on the hill  
where the girl stands on the grass  
as the kids chase the big mutt across the yard  
That is your house should be your house  
Look up girl to the hill not the pavement  
that burns your shredded feet.  
Turn that sad grimace the crooked teeth  
turn them back to where the porch shades the family  
That is should be must be you  
if you will see one more turn around the sun  
You will die here tonight  
before ten cars have passed you by  
That's it one step slow if you must  
Yes go to the house on that corner  
Leave the street and heal the broken body  
that drags behind you before the limbs fall  
and become meat for the dogs that wander

Oh but you go past the house collapse on the street  
water the hot concrete with your tears till the cars come  
and move you like tossed papers stirred by the wind  
to land at the curb  
Tomorrow is another day  
your pain is something like common sense  
Take a breath and sleep tonight  
If the stars are right you will not fly  
across this street again  
You have flown far enough  
Let another body come and pick up where you leave off  
Let another be the one that makes it to that house  
while you draw your broken wings  
about your body and close your eyes



## Cinco de Mayo Ain't a Thing

No it won't do to go half way and not know where you go  
Not after the tussle in Macarthur Park  
and the fence that springs across the borderlands  
Not when the brown of your skin darkens with each passing day

Cinco de Mayo ain't a thing  
It's a party at the cantina  
down the street the poster of spicy Latinas  
in bikinis that liquor stores display  
It is the drunken farce Mexican for a day  
see who eats the most jalapenos without shedding a tear  
Hijole mamacita how many shots of tequila  
before you pass out at the fraternity mixer  
Even McDonalds can make the  
fountains piss red white and green

Zapata is more than a dude with a big sombrero  
Cesar Chavez never played the infield for the Yankees  
Pancho Villa is not the dude with the funny mustache  
Sandino is not that other guy with a big ass hat  
and Che is not a brand on your bumper

Don't tell me it is too late to take everything back  
Andale let's pick it all up  
the arepas and tortillas  
the tamal and tamales and ropa vieja  
los caldos y salsas y frijoles negros y blancos  
let us dance our way out of here  
shuffling to rumbas sambas meringue  
mariachi tangos y cumbias  
let us take our Neruda, Borges  
Marquez Cortozar Paz  
Vargas Llosa y Gabriela Mistral  
quick before they top the wall off

We are only halfway from Aztlan  
and a long ways from El Dorado