El Dia de los Muertos

by Joani Reese

"The path back to the living must not be made slippery by tears."
(Mexican proverb)

Marigolds blaze yellow under Oaxacan sun.
Their slender necks stretch above fern foliage.
Stars of this late October hillside, they drape
their riches over the edges of terra cotta
like a beautiful woman lounging naked on a chaise,
denying the time-bound limits of beauty.

They wear their bodies recklessly, these cempazuchitl,
these flowers of the dead. Soon, an elder's hand
will pluck them from this life, mix their petals
on the ofrenda, shrouded by the incense of copal,
the backs of his descendants bent beneath a colder sun.

Subsuming their bright allotment on foreign soil,
the lost children of Mictecacihuatl dream of sugared skulls
and warm hojaldra as they lie under a canopy of snow.
Someday they, too, may return to wreathe the fleshless grin
of this country, the nexus of their souls. La Pelona is filled
but never sated with the bodies of her dead.

1. ofrenda = altar
2. Mictecacihuatl = goddess of the underworld
3. hojaldra = Mexican puff pastry
4. La Pelona = The Grim Reaper

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