

“Letting Loose the Dogs”

Even before the sudden desert downpour wakes me at two in the morning
I hear them pace back and forth in the hallway, their paws on the tile.

I turn over on my back and lie awake. I stare at the ceiling and I listen.
Rain, lightning, thunder over the house.
My wife asleep next to me, light snoring from our daughters' bedrooms.

The dogs pace the hallway.
I sit up in bed and go through my list of where water might come in - garage, kitchen,
living room, hallway.
I think of the chile plant I just planted yesterday, drowning now.

The rain comes down harder, the pacing of the dogs quicker.

I get up, walk the house, quiet but for the rain and thunder
I check for leaks, place pots and pans on kitchen counter and on the floor, in the hallway,
and I listen to the slow drip drip drip.
The dogs follow me everywhere.
I pet them, move past them, turn on the radio for them.
I read somewhere that music calms them and smile as I tune to a Mexican station; it
calms me too. I sit at the kitchen table, 2:30 in the morning, and listen to the rain outside
and to the slow drip inside as the dogs pace around the table, circle me, then lie down at
my feet.

At the kitchen table, as I look down at my dogs, I think of my father, born and raised in
México, who would never let any animal inside the house.
Los perros afuera, he would say.
And that was how it was for the one dog we had when I was a kid.
Not an inside dog. Little doghouse. Rain or shine. Cold or hot. Always outside.

I think now of when we first got our dogs, and the lady told us they were inside dogs, that they needed to be near us, in our bedroom, they needed to sleep with us when they were upset or scared.

Yes, yes, near us, inside dogs I repeated to the nice humane society lady.

I lied. As we drove away from the shelter I told my wife that the dogs were not sleeping in our bedroom,

Echoes of my dad in my head when I say I will not have animals in the bedroom.

My parents, now in their eighties, sleep with their little indoor Chihuahua in their bed.

What kind of Mexican are you? I ask my father. He laughs.

It's a sign of my dad's age, of softening, some giving up,
the dog a comfort to them both in their old age.

As I sit in the kitchen, I catch my reflection on the door of the microwave

I look just like my father, more so every day

I am reminded each morning when my father looks back at me from the bathroom mirror.

I see my father/myself making the same kind of movements,

so much in the learning, in the model, in the genes, in the years.

He is older and it saddens me to see him older, though I know too that's where I'm going.

I sit at the kitchen a while as the rain lessens, the thunder distant now, lighting faint.

The pots and pans start to quiet.

I look down at my dogs asleep and wonder how and why I am of any comfort to them.

Who will comfort me, I wonder,

as I shuffle back down the hallway, back to bed, back to sleep.