

Fiesta Morning

5 a.m.

A frigid, October morning
Bundled in hats, scarves, gloves and layers of coats.
They sip coffee, I hot chocolate
In an empty Honeywell parking lot
Together.
Waiting for the beauty to rise.

Before the sun awakens,
The first flights begin to dot the dark, New Mexican sky
Slowly beginning the day.
Normally striking,
The sunrise is hardly noticed
When entranced by the balloons moving gracefully through the air.

Some are specks in the distance,
Their bold colors and intricate patterns too far to be seen.
Others fly close enough to whisk you away
On an unforgettable journey
Across the city, over the mountain tops.
Higher than even the tram can take you.

We watch from the parking lot
Comfortable in our camping chairs.

In the field below,
Crowds of people watch the balloons hover as they depart.

Up here,
The magic pulses through the air
But we cannot hear the roar of the flame as it lights.
We don't have to shout over the crowds.
It's just us.

Together.
Sharing blankets, passing creamer.
Grammy and Poppy holding gloved hands.

Mom and B snuggling sleepy babies.

Dad and grandpa swapping stories over rich, black coffee.

Me, playing the angsty teenager all too well

Sitting in the open trunk of the van

Separating myself though grateful for the company.

I'm enthralled by the flights propelled by a flickering flame

Consuming the early morning sky.

Night Flights

The clouds lay out before me
Like a farmer's perfectly plowed fields.
The sun is beginning to lower and
The sky surrounding me is a blend of glorious hues.
Blue

 Blending to green
 Into yellow
 Which turns to orange
 And finally,
 Fiery red.

The plane flies into a blanket of comforting darkness
That wraps us in its magic
Like the sky is ours, and ours alone
Shared only with the light of twinkling stars.

I am calmed by the beauty that lies in the uncertainty of the night.

Out the window down below,
There are passing cities and towns
That are nothing more than tiny specks
And glowering lights from up here.

Somehow you know someone down there
Is mistaking you for a star
Eyes shut,
 Wishing hard.

The Serpent of Pain

The pain snuck in when I wasn't looking.
It follows the roadmap of my veins,
Circling my muscles and bones,
Taking rest stops in my joints
To regain its strength by stealing mine.

Sometimes it hides,
Coils up and finds a cozy crevice to sleep in.
For a few blissful moments, I feel relief --
My soul finally feels at home in my body.
But then the twinge comes.

My comfort stirred something in it,
Made it angry.
So it slithered through me
Like the serpent in the Garden of Eden.

It won't stop until I surrender to it.
Until I allow my body to feel dangerous,
Poisoned by his shiny apple and long, sharp fangs.
I tread lightly.
One wrong move could cause the venom to spread
And there's no one to suck it out
But me.

History's Footsteps

I shut off the ignition,
Closed the GPS that led me here to this place.
A knot formed in my throat as I realized
I came here intentionally,
But thousands longed to escape.
I am disgusted with myself
For having set this as a destination.

I notice they've added tour bus parking
So people can come by the masses
To see where other masses lost their lives.

We cross through the entrance,
An archway underneath the brick building where the S.S. guards sat,
Orchestrating the horror.

We are following their footsteps,
But we can come and go as we please.

We pass through the camp,
See the kitchens and the laundry where prisoners lived and worked.
They're shabby buildings with chipped white paint,
Obviously worn and overused
And you can tell it's not just from age.

There's another white building,
This one shaped like the Star of David.
The same stars marks the door.
I go inside and am immediately
Consumed by the stale stench of death
Lingering after all these years.
It saturates my clothing,
Fills my lungs until I think they might burst.

I cannot go in any further.
I know this is where it happened,
Where 30,000 bodies were burned

Inside the same shape that acted as a symbol of their faith.

I'm longing for fresh air
As I'm sure they were.
But I can leave whenever I want
With my body still in tact,
Still housing my soul.

I lean over a railing trying to ease the queasiness in my gut
And look down into what was once the quarry
"The Valley of Death"
It was so warmly nick-named.
The lump in my throat grows,
The queasy feeling in my gut becomes turbulent.

The quarry is now a memorial,
A giant cemetery of unmarked graves honoring those
Who are long gone.
Flowers are left, the grass is neatly mowed.
The grounds well-maintained.
They're given a level of respect in death
They weren't deemed worthy of in life.

The rest of us flock to this place
In hopes of understanding how such cruelty is possible.
Instead we leave, hearts aching
Remembering their cruel, avoidable death.