

Plane

when the plane landed
after dipping a wing towards the
fortress of El Morro
so we could ooh and
ahh ourselves into
paradise,
it bounced along the
runway with such
force that the oxygen
masks sprung down in
front of our faces and
I wasn't sure if I should
place it over my mouth
or help my sisters
with theirs
turned out, we didn't
need the masks and
everyone clapped because
they could
my dad's old friend with
the name of the month
Julio
picked us up in his
bakery van of sugar and
cockroaches,
sitting on crates, as he
swerved the puerto rican
streets to my tia's
apartment
later, when I told my
abuela how the the plane
skipped along the placid
pavement in my coarse spanish
and hand gestures
i don't know if she
understood because she
immediately crossed herself
and then I knew, that's where
my mother gets that from

French Fries

abuelo took us to the burger king
playground each night and
I tried to order french
fries in spanish
as my sisters played on
giant hamburgers
we were supposed to
forget that mom was in the
hospital laying between
thin sheets of privacy and
dad was there with her,
that we didn't know much
about why she was sick,
and whether it could happen to us
it worked on my sisters
because they didn't know
much, they could
thank youth for that, but
me? I'd convinced myself
that I knew too much
and seeing mom with needles
and lines and bags was
just too scary to deal with
so I ordered fries in
spanish, not knowing the
word for medium, but
at least I tried

Chicken

I was afraid a chicken would
come under the door and
join me in the shower
as the open barrel of
rain water splattered over
my child's body, my
mind focused on the
possibility of
fowl interceding
they were small chickens and
maybe they wanted a drink
or just to peck peck at
my feet and
they weren't alone, either
some scrawny turkeys lurked
just on the other side of
the corrugated tin walls and
wood posts concealing
my nakedness from
the green mountains and
constant sunshine
they never came in but
maybe they should have
if only for a short
reprieve from the heat
before Abuela set them
to the flame
once, Abuela broke
a hen's neck and
plucked it and
butchered it into
pieces with what must've
just been a big knife
but was a machete in
my eyes
and when she finished she said she found
unlaid eggs inside
and put them in the soup, too
and I'll always remember
it as a big surprise

but for her it
was just life

Water

he had to wait until
at least one AM
with a large barrel, some
buckets, and the
tub stopper
sitting in his worn
chair, one of those
old ones made of wood
with floral cushions that
show up in all our
old photos
sometimes he fell asleep and
who wouldn't at 63
waiting in your
favorite chair facing
the tv?
but he tried every night
hoping it would come
because while you had to wait
it didn't mean you'd be
rewarded
but when it came
it came, and it came hard
and you filled all your buckets
and barrels and pails
with the diamond water
even with the bacteria
it was good
and those parched hills
sang with the sudden
rush of pipes finally
working, the rhythm of
liquid gold fulfilling
dreams of showers
and flushing toilets
when the drought came
they cut off el campo first
leaving the mountains
isolated islands of
lush deserts

we boiled the water
because if you drank it
you'd get sick
mom learned that first hand
weakened in a
hospital bed all
because she drank from
the faucet in her
homeland

Varicela

how many children can you
fit in a barrel full of water
the answer is
one 12-year-old
a four-year-old
and a five-year-old
pretending to be dolphins
as Abuela holds a
strainer over our heads
letting the precious water
drip drip drop
over our tan skin
as we play on this
puerto rican summer
unable to go to
la playa because
our other hermana is
inside, stuck with
chickenpox but we
enjoyed the sun thinking
we weren't going to catch the
itchy itchy scratchy of
fluid filled bumps
oatmeal baths to soothe
she was only ten
so I made sure to play
chess with her
even though she couldn't come out and play
we got our comeuppance when
a week later she was
fine and
we all had our own
little war bumps
I still have the scars
to prove it