

Discovering your voice through poetry– Rafael Campo's Poems

Morbidity and Mortality Rounds

By [Rafael Campo](#)

Forgive me, body before me, for this.
Forgive me for my bumbling hands, unschooled
in how to touch: I meant to understand
what fever was, not love. Forgive me for
my stare, but when I look at you, I see
myself laid bare. Forgive me, body, for
what seems like calculation when I take
a breath before I cut you with my knife,
because the cancer has to be removed.
Forgive me for not telling you, but I'm
no poet. Please forgive me, please. Forgive
my gloves, my callous greeting, my unease—
you must not realize I just met death
again. Forgive me if I say he looked
impatient. Please, forgive me my despair,
which once seemed more like recompense. Forgive
my greed, forgive me for not having more
to give you than this bitter pill. Forgive:
for this apology, too late, for those
like me whose crimes might seem innocuous
and yet whose cruelty was obvious.
Forgive us for these sins. Forgive me, please,
for my confusing heart that sounds so much
like yours. Forgive me for the night, when I
sleep too, beside you under the same moon.
Forgive me for my dreams, for my rough knees,
for giving up too soon. Forgive me, please,
for losing you, unable to forgive.

Wilhelmina Shakespeare

By Rafael Campo

Blond hair, blue eyes, buck teeth: we taunted you
because of your intelligence. You loved
to read, and secretly I envied how
you gave yourself to poetry, alone
beneath the shade a mango tree provided.
We dubbed you “Wilhelmina Shakespeare” when
we locked you in the basement, proving force
could triumph over wisdom. “She’s a witch!”
we bellowed as we torched your diary —
but nothing we could do would make you cry.
You knew the scientific names of rocks;
you tried to teach me Spanish once, but I
responded to your questions in pig Latin.
At night, when all my other cousins watched
reruns of “Hawaii 5-0,” I’d sneak
away to spy on you. Out on the porch,
you’d be there with your sketch pad studying
the moths that crowded the bare lightbulb, starved
for that dim light, that least illumination.
Your features softened as I gazed at you:
I understood my insignificance
as I saw it was possible to know
the beauty in even the plainest things.