

"Calavera... Calavera..."

Nathan Marquam

“Hold the dark holiday in your palms,
Bite it, swallow it and survive,
Come out the far black tunnel of el Día de Muerte,
And be glad, ah so glad you are... alive!”
- Ray Bradbury, *The Halloween Tree*

i.

I'll ride the wind like a bicycle
over rocks, through ravines
until I find you. You look strange,
funny strange in this moonlight,
faded as the siren's low wail.
I follow you into a house
of old wood and black marble.
Of course it's haunted. Why else
would you lead me here? Father,
time means nothing. I'll chase you
up Roman cathedrals and down
the streets of Mexico until the earth
opens to give you back. It has to.
We can't have Halloween without you.

ii.

No, you are not gone. You are in pieces,
a split-sugar skull I pull apart like taffy. You
shatter in sharp bursts across my tongue,
live a moment longer. I pluck seconds
and hours from the ends of my years,
spend them missing you. Your face sinks

in my mind like a pumpkin's, curled in
on its own expression. Loving you is a soft
dissection, candlelight spilled across
frozen ground, brought to wreckage.
I scan the treelines for your smile,
comb handfuls of stars for a kitestring,
beg it to take me to you.

iii.

Shimmering, like swimming up
from the bottom of someplace dark,
I see you. You climb a tree
with no leaves, a River Styx tower
that dangles a thousand faces,
but the crowd of lights rejects me.
Blue and translucent, you say
I am too much my skin, the dark
shreds of bark that bite it. Your fingers
encircle my wrist, and I see your smile.
Hear the familiar rasp of your voice.
Kick the bark away. Learn to let go.