

Gloria Anzaldúa
Borderlands

La Frontera
The New Mestiza



THIRD EDITION

Interface (for Frances Doughty)

She'd always been there
 occupying the same room.
 It was only when I looked
 at the edges of things
 my eyes going wide watering,
 objects blurring.
 Where before there'd only been empty space
 I sensed layers and layers,
 felt the air in the room thicken.
 Behind my eyelids a white flash
 a thin noise.
 That's when I could see her.

Once I accidentally ran my arm
 through her body
 felt heat on one side of my face.
 She wasn't solid.
 The shock pushed me against the wall.
 A torrent of days swept past me
 before I tried to "see" her again.
 She had never wanted to be flesh she told me
 until she met me.
 At first it was hard to stay
 on the border between
 the physical world
 and hers.
 It was only there at the interface
 that we could see each other.
 See? We wanted to touch.
 I wished I could become
 pulsing color, pure sound, bodiless as she.
 It was impossible, she said
 for humans to become noumenal.

What does it feel like, she asked
 to inhabit flesh,
 wear blood like threads

 constantly running?
 I would lie on the bed talking
 she would hover over me.
 Did I say talk?
 We did not use words.
 I pushed my thoughts toward her.
 Her "voice" was a breath of air
 stirring my hair
 filling my head.
 Once Lupe my roommate
 walked right through her
 dangling the car keys.
 I felt Leyla shiver.
 I named her Leyla,
 a pure sound.

I don't know when I noticed
 that she'd begun to glow,
 to look more substantial
 than the blurred furniture.
 It was then I felt a slight touch,
 her hand—a tendril of fog—
 on the sheets where she'd lain
 a slight crease, a dampness,
 a smell between candles and skin.
 You're changing, I told her.
 A yearning deluged me—
 her yearning.
 That's when I knew
 she wanted to be flesh.
 She stayed insubstantial day after day
 so I tried to blur
 my borders, to float, become pure sound.
 But my body seemed heavier,
 more inert.

I remember when she changed.
 I could hear the far away slough of traffic
 on the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway,
 the people downstairs were playing salsa.

We lay enclosed by margins, hems,
where only we existed.

She was stroking stroking my arms
my legs, marveling at their solidity,
the warmth of my flesh, its smell.
Then I touched her.

Fog, she felt like dense fog,
the color of smoke.

She glowed, my hands paled then gleamed
as I moved them over her.

Smoke-fog pressing against my eyelids
my mouth, ears, nostrils, navel.

A cool tendril pressing between my legs
entering.

Her finger, I thought
but it went on and on.

At the same time
an iciness touched my anus,
and she was in
and in and in

my mouth opening
I wasn't scared just astonished
rain drummed against my spine
turned to steam as it rushed through my veins
light flickered over me from toe to crown.

Looking down my body I saw
her forearm, elbow and hand
sticking out of my stomach
saw her hand slide in.

I wanted no food no water nothing
just her—pure light sound inside me.

My roommate thought I was
having an affair.

I was "radiant," she said.

Leyla had begun to swell
I started hurting a little.

When I started cramping
she pushed out

her fingers, forearm, shoulder.
Then she stood before me,

fragile skin, sinews tender as baby birds
and as transparent.

She who had never eaten
began to hunger.

I held a cup of milk to her mouth,
put her hand on my throat
made swallowing motions.

I spooned mashed banana into her bird mouth,
hid the baby food under the bed.

One day my roommate asked
who was staying in my room,
she'd heard movements.

A friend recovering from a contagious
skin disease, I said.

She ran out saying, I'm going to the Cape
indefinitely. See you.

We had the house to ourselves.
I taught her how to clean herself,
to flush.

She would stand before the mirror
watching her ears, long and diaphanous,
begin to get smaller, thicker.

She spent a lot of time at the window.
Once I caught her imitating
the shuffle of the baglady.

No, like this, I told her.
Head up, shoulders back.

I brought in the TV.
This is how humans love, hate, I said.

Once we sat on the stoop
watching a neighbor sweep the sidewalk.

Hello, he yelled, hello, I yelled back,
eh-oh, she whispered.

Watch my lips, Ley-la.
Say it, Ley-la.

Good. I love you.
Ah uff oo, she said.

Soon Leyla could pass,
go for milk at the bodega, count change.

But no matter how passionately we made

love it was never like before
she'd taken on skin and bone.

Do you ever want to go back, I asked her.
No, it's slower here and I like that.

I hate summers in NYC, I told her,
wish it was winter already.

The temperature dropped 10 degrees 20
and when a chill wind began to blow in Brooklyn

I told her to stop
messing with the cycles that affected others.

I watched what I said
and let Leyla run the place.

She had snow in the livingroom
and a tree in the bathtub.

Nights I lit the illegal fireplace.
Once when reaching toward a high shelf,

I wished I was taller.
When my head touched the ceiling
I had to yell at her to stop,
reverse.

How do you do it, I asked her.

You do it, too, she said,
my species just does it faster,
instantly, merely by thinking it.

The first time she rode the subway
I had to drag her out.

I suppose it was the noise,
the colors flashing by, the odd people
that held her open-mouthed gaze.

I had to do a gig in L.A.,
speak at a conference, was short on cash,
but she wanted to come.

She walked past the flight attendants
didn't even have to hide in the lavatory.

She laughed at my amazement, said
humans only saw what they were told to see.

Last Christmas I took her home to Texas.

Mom liked her.
Is she a lez, my brothers asked.

I said, No, just an alien.
Leyla laughed.

IV

Cihuatllyotl, Woman Alone

*Yo llamo a mujer,
canto por mujer.*

*Cubierta con serpientes vengo yo,
al lugar del encuentro me acerco,
repito conjuros para provocar amor.
Clamo por mujer.*

Ya llego, llamo.

—Gloria Anzaldúa