

## **Silencio cerca de una piedra antigua**

*By Rosario Castellanos (1925-1974)*

**Translation by Richard E. McDorman**

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### **Silence near an Ancient Stone**

Here I sit with all my words intact,  
as if with a basket of green fruit.

The fragments  
of a thousand fallen ancient gods  
seek and bind each other in my blood, yearning  
to restore their statue.  
A song desires to rise  
from their shattered mouths to mine,  
a scent of burned resins, some gesture  
of mysterious wrought stone.  
But oblivion and treachery am I—  
the shell that of the sea kept not  
even the echo of the smallest wave.  
And I look not upon  
the sunken fanes,  
but only at the trees  
that move their vast shadow  
above the ruins and gnaw  
the passing wind with acid teeth.  
And the signs close beneath my eyes like  
the flower beneath a blind man's clumsy fingers.  
But this I know: behind my body  
another one lies low,  
and around me many breaths  
in secret cross  
like forest creatures in the night.  
I know that in some place,  
as the desert cactus does,  
a starry heart of thorns  
awaits a man like the cactus does the rain.  
But I know just a few words  
in the tongue or tombstone  
under which they buried my ancestors alive.

## *Experimental version in iambic tetrameter*

### **Silence near an Ancient Stone**

So here I sit with all my words  
intact like with a basketful  
of fruit both green and still unripe.

The fragments of a thousand gods:  
the fallen ancient ones that seek  
and bind each other in my blood;  
they yearn to bring their statue back.  
A song desires to rise above  
from shattered mouths of theirs to mine,  
a scent of burned resins and  
a gesture of mysterious stone.  
Oblivion and treachery am I—  
the shell that of the sea kept not  
the echo of the smallest wave.  
I look not at the sunken fanes,  
but only at the trees that cast  
their shadow vast above the ruins  
and gnaw the wind with acid teeth.  
The signs do close beneath my eyes  
like flowers beneath a blind man's hands.  
Yet I know that behind me goes  
another body hiding low.  
Around me many breaths do cross  
in secret like the forest beasts  
move furtively throughout the night.  
I know that in some place a heart  
of stars and thorns awaits a man  
just like the cactus does the rain—  
this both I and the cactus know.

But I know hardly any words  
among the tongue or on the stone  
beneath which they did bury my  
ancestors who were still alive.