

POEMS

Sonia Guiñansaca

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Calling Cards

I.

Across Oceans

And land

Working to connect

One phone line

With another

Like an umbilical cord

These \$5, \$10, \$20

Square cards are more than plastic

These calling cards

Have heartbeats

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II.

We survive through phone lines
A cycle of dialing
Numbers

On the other line waited abuela
On the other line waited memories
On the other line waited birthday wishes

That should have been given in person
While eating guava cake

But we	were here
And you	were there
On the other line	we waited
By payphones	we waited
For your voice	we waited
That is all we had	
My dad waited	for you
	he still does

III.

How do you dial a loved one
When your fingers have work out
From weaving too many memories
When you voice has changed
Since the last time you saw them in person

Your bones have broken from their absence
Your lips have withered
Your face is the only clue left
Of what they might look like now

Perhaps it's best to not look into the mirror
Perhaps you are too ashamed of holding on to old memories

IV.

I can still hear Abuelita Alegria's voice

Abuelita, cómo está Ecuador...

Si, Abuelita, prometo que regreso...

And then

A long pause

You hear her shuffling the phone

Trying to remember which side to talk from

She is not familiar with this technology

I call it old school

Some call it poverty

Abuelita's gentle voice

Rocks me back to memories of when

She carried me as a baby

My face lays flat on her back

She hangs up and I lay gripping on to her words

Trying not to let go

Never enough minutes

V.

Calling cards

Don't have

Heartbeats

Anymore

They just hang

In the store

Teasing you

Now, dad stops at the bodega

For other reasons

His mouth curls up around the rim of the bottle

Longing for one more conversation

I think he believes that with every beer

He gets closer to heaven

Closer to her Closer to home

(and secretly I wish that was true)

IV.

The phone goes unused
 (like the passport in my wallet)
No more dialing

In his palms rests spaces where my grandma is buried
And even then the lines on his hands create borders
Restricting him from getting too close

Dad wants to hold my hand
But mostly we look at each other hoping to find comfort
 He says that I look like Abuela

America Runs on Immigrants

My mother works on the 23rd floor of a glass building in the middle of Times Square as a server of a catering company / My father rides the train home from work, in his backpack he carries a pair of Timbs with blotches of oil / Neither of them have eaten/ The thing about America is that migrant workers go days without properly eating so that America can function / My mother who goes by Maggy will stand for 8 hours straight bouncing on the balls of her feet to catch any demands by white professionals that for some reason know how to work a google drive but have no idea how to make their own coffee / My father who goes by Segundo ironically is always first to cook, first to burn his hands, first to serve, first to deliver so that men in suits can get their rush lunch order / My mother & father never get days off or paid holidays or bonuses or a 401k or healthcare / My mother & father depend on the power of Vicks, hot tea, and prayers to *la Virgen* / Sometimes my father and mother do not feel like mine - they feel like they belong to this country / My mother does not see father / My father does not see his brother / My siblings don't see mom or dad / America sees them at all times / America sees our parents more often than we do at 4am, at 7pm, at 11pm, and midnight / My 9 year old brother clasps his tiny brown hands to pray *Diosito please take care of mom* / My father carries our old school photos in his wallet, folded gently not to crease our faces, this is how he looks after us, this is how he holds on to us / My mother carries a large purse with all our documents because *just in case* / They both accommodate America's routine by moving around birthdays and bautismos and weddings / America is a spoiled brat wanting more and more and more / America screams *Go Back To Your Country, Stop Stealing Our Jobs* and simultaneously whines *Where is my lunch?*

Glory

Mi mama se levanta
A las 7 de la mañana, se baña
Sus pies bendecidos en agua
Es divina

Después, empieza con su maquillaje
Her brown hands
Gently holding the black eyeliner
(for a migrant woman these are lines she welcomes)

She places her dark brown hair in a bun
Carefully placing bobby pins
Like carefully placing lipstick
Like carefully placing hope on this land

Mami's knowledge teaches me that my wings
Are meant to be thick
Meant to take up space
(these are rituals I grew up with)

So I repeat

Every morning creating self into existence
Between lipstick and softness
Between borders and belonging
(these are ways I survive)

So, I repeat
Arching my eyebrows
Jewelry over my neck
Red nails pointy enough to hold homes
Homes I am building
(homes I left)

So, I repeat

Adorning all my genders
(like the gospels never sung at my church)

This becomes biblical
Let this be an ode to femmes of color
Whose celestial eye shadows crack the heavens
Whose thick thighs resurrect possibilities

So, I repeat

What glory we incite
What glory we create
What glory we are!

Sonia Guiñansaca is an international acclaimed poet, cultural organizer, and social justice activist. As a writer and performer, they create narrative poems and essays on migration, queerness, feminism, climate change, and nostalgia. Often collaborating with filmmakers and visual artists. Born in Ecuador (proud Kichwa-Kañari), at the age of 5 they migrated to the United States to reunite with their parents in NY. In 2007, Guiñansaca came out publicly as an undocumented immigrant. They emerged as a national leader in the migrant artistic and political communities where they coordinated and participated in groundbreaking civil disobedience actions. Guiñansaca co-founded some of the largest undocumented organizations in the U.S, including some of the first artistic projects by and for undocumented writers and artists. Since then, Sonia has worked for over a decade in both policy and cultural efforts building equitable infrastructures for migrant artists. They have been awarded residencies and fellowships from Voices of Our Nation Arts Foundation, Poetry Foundation, British Council, and the Hemispheric Institute for Performance & Politics. Guiñansaca has performed at the Met, the NYC Public Theater, Lehmann Maupin Gallery, El Museo Del Barrio, Brooklyn Museum, Galeria De la Raza, The Nuyorican Poets Café, La Mama Gallery, toured campuses across the country, and has been featured on PEN American, Interview Magazine, Latina Magazine, Ms. Magazine, Teen Vogue, Diva Magazine UK, CNN, NBC, and PBS to name a few. Their migration and cultural equity work have also taken them to London and Mexico City to advise on migrant policy and arts programming. They are now a consultant to national cultural institutions, philanthropic foundations, and multi-media organizations on cultural activations, artist development, and content production. They serve as the national advisory Board Member of the Laundromat Project in NYC. Guiñansaca self-published their debut chapbook *Nostalgia and Borders* in 2016. They are the co-editor of the forthcoming anthology *Somewhere We Are Human* (Fall 2021 HarperCollins). Guiñansaca is launching Alegria Press, a publishing house for Queer, Trans, Non- binary, and migrant undocumented writers in Spring 2021. [post\(s\)](#)

