

## **El Milagro es Fácil** by Allene Nichols

The miracle is easy.  
You kiss living flesh and draw back from the corpse,  
your last memory corrupted by the taste of salt.  
Later, you'll remember the scent of lavender perfume,  
the light dying from the eyes,  
the sun brightly ironic in the window.

Later, you'll tell yourself she's in a better place,  
that she's at last free of the pain.  
But you know these half truths are facile  
and the unspoken thought unfair.  
She left you, and she left you before she died,  
as she pulled away,  
as she prepared.

Later, you'll go home  
and try to understand the point of cups and toothpicks,  
of towels and roses and socks and tea,  
how they relate to you.  
You'll stare at her photo, trying to believe you can't call  
and she won't answer,  
the way she's always answered.

And later still, on El Día de Los Muertos  
the smell of marigolds will remind you  
of an afternoon, a garden, laughter like rain,  
and green shoots.  
Her shrine will already be tucked away inside you  
and candy skulls will burn your tongue.

Every year, on this day, you'll believe the sky is gray,  
and someday you'll forget why.  
You'll watch the falling leaves in the golden dusk  
and feel vaguely guilty for enjoying this pleasure.  
The toothache in your chest will nag at you  
like a spoiled child,  
but your mind will wander away, dazed,  
because it needs this sweet insomnia.

The miracle, you will learn, is easy.  
Living with it is hard.

**Dinner** by Allene Nichols

I'm told the human palm  
is a delicacy for cannibals.  
When the Belgians cut off the hands  
of children in the Congo,  
did anyone eat them?  
Were the hands fed to the children  
who'd lost them  
or the beasts who did the hacking?

I'm told that eating the flesh of a dead loved one  
is a sacred act in some cultures.  
But eating the brain can cause the transmission of kuru  
the sickness that causes people to laugh  
themselves to death.  
If you refuse to eat the brain of a person  
who laughed themselves to death,  
do you dishonor them?  
Or would eating, say, an eyeball,  
be just as effective?

I'm told the Donner party  
ate the dead members  
to survive a terrible winter.  
When they were done,  
did they sit by the waning fire  
and compare the virtues of the palm  
to that of the thigh?  
Or did they say Sally's flesh was sweet  
just like Sally?  
Or did they catch themselves laughing  
and stop  
for fear they'd die from it?

I'm told that some people believe  
that during the Eucharist,  
the wine and bread  
become the flesh and blood  
of Christ.  
Do they believe that the flesh  
comes from his palm  
or from a less delicate part?  
And if they took a bite out of a dead relative  
would they recognize the taste?

If drinking blood is a sacred act,  
why aren't vampires worshiped and honored?  
Is the perversion in the drinking  
or in the thinking that they,  
the already dead, have the same rights  
as the living?

When they get hungry,  
do vampires and cannibals sometimes nibble on their own palms?

