

Still Life, or, Migratory Restlessness

Wings fluttering, flapping

Sand, a soft place for a corpse to land, where
I unspool sorrow, sorrow for what? One: that I could not drift
like you. An envy. Two: when I captured you

in a photograph, I did not move this driftwood
away from the frame. What kind of honoring is this?
Feather and bone I passed by two times—
too sad, I'd said. When you lived, dear bird, could you tear fear

from freedom, when wind took you
askew? A bird does not ponder when
to leave, they just do. I linger too long
on this thought hear the flute fall—I am not a bird, no,

but I am. I flail and flutter, too, but what do you do
when sky turns to stone?



I

Picture of My Father (Bogotá, Colombia, 1961) Before He Moved to the US and Became Mute for Half a Year

There's wonder in the eyes. Wondering where
this balsa plane will fly. I wonder what he felt
on that plane from Bogotá to New York, where staring
into space became the place he stayed, America just a welt
where he strains to speak so speaks no words, instead
turns over stone after stone everywhere he goes, each one a door
to where he'd rather be. *Corre, corre*, he hears in his head
while looking for salamanders, looking for
something other than what's there. How to restrain
his singing the teacher wanted to know,
this teacher who treats his Spanish as if were a stain
to remove. In English she says so
strictly: "Jesus is always watching you," words whispered to warn
but "Silencio" was all he heard. Is this where his quiet was born?

After Rilke's The Cadet Picture of My Father



II

Erasure Based on My Father's School Report in the US

a discipline problem with a good mind. has yet to conform
to accept what is expected .

better in reading.

plus

in writing tries to produce distracted,

sings has sense and

settles

with gusto lies energetically.

explosive weaving, pleasure itself

has yet

to quiet

