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Poetry by José Angel Araguz



Listening

Augustina spoke for an
hour the last time
you saw her. Eyes
that perceived nothing beyond
the white clouds cancer
left her with looked
out across the ceiling
as her voice carried
people she'd seen disappear.

You listened as sons
walked past the hospital
lights and called from
different cities, talked of
work or lack of
work, of coming home
as if a tide
had risen, kept them
walking farther north. You
listened as cousins fell
from the lips of
gossip, gone so long,
it'd be bad luck
to even speak their
names, names she spoke
as if having them
heard summoned from silence,
faces never seen beyond
their youth back before
her eyes. You listened,
wanting to hear her
fill the sky with
all the family lost,
all the faces remembered
as only she could
remember them. You spent
days afterward staring after
clouds, seeing each one
change to nothing familiar.
When the nurse came
and motioned for you
to leave, you said
nothing, only bowed
your head. Her voice
kept to its whispered
grit a moment more
while the nurse could
not help but bow
her head and join
you in listening to
what you may never
understand beyond that hour,
to what another may
have mistaken as prayer.



On Touch

Touch is the first drug.

There are rocks where I stand, and grass. My bare feet ruminate: touch by far is kinder to the soul than speech.

Enter the ocean, touch swarms.

Each night, you close your eyes and fall into that touch of the first time the body slept before you learned to call it night.

Absentmindedly, I touch the lampshade; the shadows in the room shiver.

Touching, letting go, returning to touch: we love with the persistence of flies!

The blades of the ceiling fan keep to their circle. That shudder of blade and light, that mix of air: is it touch?

How fast these words, dear pencil, dear clutched one—what we do blurs at the touch, at the fragile turn of a second.

Each night, you close your eyes, your eyelashes clash, your eyelids yearn and yearn to seal, but only touch.

Lint trap of dreams, where everything collects onto a screen, a clouded dark that at the first touch falls apart.

At the end—without touch—the body stops sharing what it knows.

Not the paper, but the words are a skin—not the ink but reading is touch.

You step outside, and your body knows the weather. When you die, you leave this weather behind.

Art Information

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José Angel Araguz, PhD, is the author of *Rotura* (Black Lawrence Press, 2022). His poetry and prose have appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *Poetry International*, *The Acentos Review*, and *Oxidant | Engine*, among other places. He is an assistant professor at Suffolk University, where he serves as editor-in-chief of *Salamander* and is also a faculty member of the Solstice Low-Residency MFA Program.

For more information, visit José Angel Araguz's website, [The Friday Influence](#) [8].

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