

MY VERSION OF FREEDOM

They say love is when you look at someone you want to eat and won't eat them. Two days ago, on the roof across from us, a man cupped a pigeon

and called down to a woman in white, "Would you like to buy one?" She nodded, would soon draw a knife around the soft circumference

of the bird's neck to cure her mother's cough. That night, a rum-weary young man pressed his wrists together to show he felt shackled to Castro.

Yesterday, a hurricane gusted through Havana, sent chickens swirling into the air along with the sugar cane field's ghostly smoke flares

to call for help. Today the man stands on the roof, alone. A white pigeon bursts out of his hands. Why he allows it to escape, I don't know.

Anymore than I know why it isn't a dove or if it's the woman in white transformed and needing to be seen off—

This is my version of freedom: where one person's paradise is another one's prison. You've brought me here, paid my way into the country.

One day, we huddled under a steel awning while the rain banged its brains out. You said to the man beside us, "It's rough out today."

"What is rough for you? You're rich!" he replied. As if I'm free to overlook lives that so closely touch our own: the woman in our casa,

her husband soft-eyed, rough-palmed, who wouldn't ever hurt her but for his love of rum. He drinks in the kitchen each day.

The woman builds a white wall around herself to keep unwanted grief out. Her husband slowly chips away at her with every drink,

until the wall collapses to chalked rubble and a white bird escapes. Someday the woman will be strong enough

to return to her body, to rebuild herself, to leave this ruin of a marriage. But because I am never happy, I still see her life without the wings.

I hail from a town with steel bars. I need to learn a language other than oppression.