

# El Dia de los Muertos

*by* Joani Reese

"The path back to the living must not be made slippery by tears."  
(Mexican proverb)

Marigolds blaze yellow under Oaxacan sun.  
Their slender necks stretch above fern foliage.  
Stars of this late October hillside, they drape  
their riches over the edges of terra cotta  
like a beautiful woman lounging naked on a chaise,  
denying the time-bound limits of beauty.

They wear their bodies recklessly, these cempazuchitl,  
these flowers of the dead. Soon, an elder's hand  
will pluck them from this life, mix their petals  
on the ofrenda, shrouded by the incense of copal,  
the backs of his descendants bent beneath a colder sun.

Subsuming their bright allotment on foreign soil,  
the lost children of Mictecacihuatl dream of sugared skulls  
and warm hojaldra as they lie under a canopy of snow.  
Someday they, too, may return to wreath the fleshless grin  
of this country, the nexus of their souls. La Pelona is filled  
but never sated with the bodies of her dead.

1. ofrenda = altar
2. Mictecacihuatl = goddess of the underworld
3. hojaldra = Mexican puff pastry
4. La Pelona = The Grim Reaper

