

# INVISIBLE PATHS

by  
**Silvia Scheibli**



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IN MY SKIN IS A HOLY RIVER.

The sun grows flowers with my blood.  
 I take ashes from my shoes  
     and walk with a sand dune in my lap  
                     into Yucca shadows.

A condor rides wind currents  
                                     in my face.

Afternoon steps from the stream  
                     on the back of a horse  
             points to the sun  
                                     asleep under Jimson Weed.

Rain  
     on the back of my neck  
 flashes from the mesa  
                             flies  
     in a flock of siskins  
                             across Palo Verde trees,  
 floods my shoes  
                     with sea urchins.

                                    With a thumb  
 the moon holds a poor-will's tail  
     builds tents of light  
                             between catclaw bushes  
 throws a cape over the kit fox  
     sits full lotus inside moon-lilies.

My river is of white sand  
     horny toads  
                     with white aprons  
 guard the waves  
 night-blooming jasmine keeps its course.

Out of its silence  
     vermillion flycatchers  
     dart into my sleep.

## COYOTE

Blood spurted like young lizards.

The steel inflicted frenzy  
could not be absorbed  
and finally failed by itself.

He began licking the wound,  
biting black ants on his paws.

By noon the next day  
his broken tendons had wilted.

The leg trap moved its daggers  
through his rib cage  
into his brain.

Yellow orioles flew out of his eyes.

The sun pitched a tent over him.

The only movement  
came from the steel's glint.

A SUMMER NIGHT  
IN THE OLD WOMAN  
MOUNTAINS  
ON THE MOJAVE

I am part of the rocks  
my granite skirt  
billows across salt flats.

The horizon  
my blue kerchief  
in the evening.

A collared lizard  
throws a bouquet of time  
into the sun.

Together we watch it  
grow a tail of stars.

From the ledge under my eyes  
an owl takes flight.

Her wings unwrap canyons  
and ignite darkness.

The visible night  
seeps from Yucca fibers.

Rodin's Balzac  
steps away from a limestone wall  
sniffing out a new lair.

Jimson Weed flowers  
draw the moon  
into their laps.

The air  
turns to sand.

## TERNS IN JUNE

Fog lifts June out of yellow Lupines.

Terns, sky's white leaves pull the sea's  
blue dress over their heads.

The air is full of swords  
and red beaks.

Their forked tails point out  
sea anemones growing from my wrists.

## THE MOON'S BOOKS

It was discovered the moon  
was closest to certain books.

The books of the Immanentists,  
his favorites.

Hidden in the deepest and  
most luminous crevices.

Taken out  
when assured of absolute privacy.

Read and re-read on very dark nights.

## LAS VEGAS SUNRISE

Dawn  
    bursts  
        from under the rock wren's wing  
onto streams of sand.

    Banderillas  
of red flowers  
        pierce the sky's neck.

Hummingbirds roosting  
                in my collar  
disappear in the blossoms.

Streetcleaners  
    sweep  
        the red petals into trash cans.

Painters  
    paste them on billboards  
        proclaiming  
        the ace of hearts  
        your last chance.



## EXPLANATION OF SPACE

In  
the  
desert  
mountains  
grew  
at the ends  
of our eyelashes.  
Our faces  
were  
hollow,  
coyote's mouthpiece.  
Shattered  
coarse  
red sand  
packed with seeds.  
Sky's taproot  
blank  
above the mesa.  
Dark  
smoky arroyos.  
Fragrant  
wind in lilies.  
Snowed-in  
limestone.  
Lost.  
Made  
and  
unmade  
sand  
dunes.

## WHITE TONGUES OF FIG TREES

I have left the sky  
and the dunes  
for rock wrens,  
and the lizard  
keeper of the rain.

There is no sand  
in the seams of my eyes.  
Eyes used to  
grinding a desert afternoon  
into words.  
Waking without  
desert lilies  
is blindness.

I have left the white  
tongues of fig trees  
for silence  
to fold and refold.

## ARROWHEAD JUNCTION, CALIFORNIA

Yellow primroses compete with old railroad ties.  
A window frame holds a Prickly Pear patch.  
Packrats sleep under Yucca skeletons.  
House finches proclaim the new owner.

## MARC CHAGALL'S JERUSALEM WINDOWS

A blue sun spreads its wings  
over a blue dove,  
the sea is purple,  
light's red scales swim  
through water plants' blue roots.

A red lion basks in the sun's red hands,  
blue houses outline his face,  
leaves and green bricks  
blow through his fur.

A purple sun lifts red water  
from the backs of fish,  
a green boat sails by light's blue leaves  
across a crimson forest.

Rivers are fermented in vines,  
suns scrape yellow shutters,  
birds carry blue light to nests,  
wind grazes on poppies,  
sheep walk in and out of eyes,  
green hands mingle with green roots.

Light bleeds from a sun  
whose metal has stooped trees,  
poppies are in its vise,  
a wind with double heads crouches by the door,  
insanity screams  
on a path of swords.

Green lambs, olive trees, blue doves  
call the light by name:  
green dance of the wheat field.

Blue fish in his fur  
a silver leopard  
stalks the green moon,  
the village sleeps with hummingbirds in its throat,  
doves scatter night's leaves  
over yellow houses.

# DESIRÉ

Your lips pushed against mine.

You pushed against the sky.  
Air was born on your cheek.

Among Himalayan azaleas  
We saw you.

Your skin in the fragrant white flowers.  
Your voice in their dark roots.

A thousand mesas carry you within us.

## FOR DESIRÉ

I want the moon  
at the bottom of your face

Moon playing hide 'n' go seek  
with hands of a thousand children

Moon playing with a thousand lizards  
bright under white desert lilies

I want the moon  
at the bottom of the river

Singing with brown and green voice of salamanders  
and wet ferns curled like roots around your eyes

I want to keep the moon  
forever under my tongue

Always as damp as on the first day  
first afternoon, your waist moved inside mine

## DOVES FROM DESIRÉ

When we named you  
we did not know  
how blue doves  
would flutter from under  
your eyelids.

We may as well  
have been trying to name  
the depth of the river  
where Alder shadows  
rise through us.

We did not guess  
how blue doves from your eyes  
would fly  
through our temple.

How we would  
coo among them  
by the river.

## WITH LIGHT ON THE ATHABASCA GLACIER

On this mountain  
Ice light hangs in trees

White firs stand in its side

A ptarmigan settles her beak  
between the glacier's round shoulders

Blind-folded the sky races

Frenzied where the snow is thinnest  
Backing-up in deeper drifts

Then the sun stops the chase  
Welds the ice light to my back

With my ribs standing in the light  
Around ice.

## FROM AÑO NUEVO

## TIDE POOLS

Clouds pull the sea  
closely around their necks.

Fog claws sea urchins.

Waves cut their teeth  
on the sky.

Sea foam  
throws the horizon  
against my face.

I am the luminous space  
between two rock crabs  
searching my sleeves.

## EXILE FROM STORKS

A white heron  
stabs the last small fish  
lingering in my blood  
since the last time  
i saw storks  
on top of the straw roof  
arranging branches  
into a sturdier nest.

Since then  
I leaned against  
a desert sky without promises  
of brutal diversions  
of gas stations.  
I leaned against the desert heat  
poured from a sky  
of delicate mountains,  
where the yellow of a cliff rose  
danced in a ring of light  
on the darker yellow  
of a chuckwalla's tail.

I have said sacred vows  
with the wind of sand dunes  
whose eyebrows are the slight circles on sand  
around a desert lily,  
only known to certain travellers,  
whether crossing arroyos on salt flats,  
or arroyos between one's ribs.

And hearing the storks' beaks  
pecking out traffic lights,  
i wonder how long it will be  
before i will be back  
on the straw roof,  
if ever.

## WILD BURRO

A burro's eyes are cages for the sun.  
Open nets for butterflies.  
He knows the sand's language is braced on the wind.  
He sees the storm in a lizard's throat.  
He avoids the leash hidden in the creosote bush.  
Yet order forms controlling his herd  
do not wear red jackets  
their scent cannot be taken from water  
and helicopters explode in the burro's mouth.

## NAVAJO SANDSTONE

Smooth faces without childhood  
wrap the sky  
in telephone wires,  
throw cement  
into the canyon's eyes,  
press tourniquets  
against sandstone ribs,  
carry off Anasazi paintings  
to parlors,  
tape the moon-lily's song,  
edit it for bedrooms,  
bulldoze it under parking lots,  
lust for the Cottonwoods'  
green bride,  
Escalante River,  
dark sleeve of rain.



ARM IN ARM  
FEDERICO, THE SUN  
AND THE SEA

Arm in arm Federico and the sun  
have offered the sea, a green holiday

The sea accepted, is packing bags  
full of foam and dried fruit

They are handing out mirrors  
and garlands

The air of lupines lights torches  
on the roads the sea will travel

On dry roads the sea  
will come walking

They will lead with a thousand mirrors  
a thousand knives will follow

Trees will face the other way  
and the air will become marble

Arm in arm Federico and the sun  
pack the earth full of salt and fruit

Arm in arm they are handed  
little hand mirrors of death

## WILLET

There are invisible paths  
in the willet's cry.  
Sounds one expects to hear at dusk  
while walking near Jimson Weed  
when the blossoms  
take the moon in their mouths.

The sound isn't made in the bird's throat  
but by the spreading of wings,  
as by the unfolding of flowers,  
their white feathers and white petals  
flash the evening light  
over the sand.

## DEAF MAN

An old man takes the afternoon out of his teeth  
and the broken window from his armpit  
and begins to listen to the red boulder.

He dreams of the white moon's song,  
a silver snake's movement, a winter catclaw bush.

But he hears only highway noises  
cutting across the worn tablecloth.

He sees two ravens  
separating him from a dark sky.

## POEMS FROM AÑO NUEVO

### ALONG CLIFFS

The shore's eye teeth  
are exposed in my face.  
A saw of sea foam  
cuts through sedimentary layers  
of common expressions.

In the scars  
I find kelp beds  
full of anemones.

Their green takes me  
along cracks  
in old kivas of Hovenweep.

Above me  
their red corn vessels.

Below me  
broken sea urchin cases.

Both contain  
a sacred world  
that does not speak  
from microphones.

Only via T-shaped  
or round doorways  
that are entered  
and not entered.

## WALKING IN AN UNFAMILIAR PLACE

Walking where  
the sea collects  
in specks around the eyes of finches.  
Walking where  
the afternoon sun settles on spines  
turning them a dark blue.  
Where yellow flowers build visions between rocks and clouds.  
Jimson Weed carries the certain promise of a white egret.  
Each petal points to an unseen cliff.

## NIGHT AT SEA

Our boat follows Grebes  
resting on sky's rim.  
  
The moon ignites barnacles in its side.  
  
We approach a reef.  
  
Night's breath stops in mid air  
as the loon calls a strange name.  
  
We do not answer out loud.  
Our speech was left on shore.  
  
We answer with our hands  
blooming on the reef.

## ECOSYSTEMS

Yellowlegs  
wade  
in coffee cups

a hummingbird  
drinks  
from an opera glass

Rainbow trout  
spawn  
in swimming pools

Mountain Larkspur  
rent  
nurseries

Swallowtails  
invade  
paint stores

Mountain Lions  
stand in line  
for hunting licenses

Tussock moths  
sabotage  
DDT warehouses

Rosy Finches  
gather seeds  
from freezers

## SANTA ANNA

Sand dunes rear up,  
trapped in wind's bridle.

Yucca's crown of railroad spikes  
cuts off the wind's tongue.

Telephone poles in white dresses  
race across saltflats.

Stones in my eyes  
grind afternoon into fine sand.

## A DESERT STORM

White moon sketches thunderheads  
White Jimson Weed blossoms begin to play  
White throat of poor-will expands  
White bark of fig tree crouches nearer

Black mesa drags her long skirt of mud  
over the canyon.

## NOON

Heat sleeps on grey branches  
pushing wind  
out of rocks and leaves.

Wind retreats into piñon pines  
along with birds.  
A spiny lizard tumbles on a wall.  
The sun eats cactus spines.

Wie gross ist das Leiden im Zauber?

The mesa paints her eyes purple.  
Teaching gourds the inward and outward  
of silence. The coyote knows this,  
and boasts of it to the stars.

Everything learns from the mesa.  
The Indigo bush excels in learning.  
Only the Jimson Weed flowers revolt,  
because of their love for music.

## BIRTHDAY

My childhood  
comes at me  
like a helicopter.  
I denounce  
the soft hands  
tying my visions  
in a closet.  
What is mine  
I print  
on the pine tree's  
yellow dust.  
Shake the branches  
and become visible  
on a  
Tiger moth's  
forehead.

## RITES OF SPRING

Luminous silver windows  
openings in the sky  
reflect kelp covered rocks  
in a flock  
of festive Bonapartes.

In their midst  
chant the unborn  
and lead  
the frantic migration.



## FOR ANDALUSIA

Eulalia's breasts are starving

Eulalia's breasts have sunk  
into the night

Where the moon should be  
are her breasts  
pointing to Federico  
who should not be dead

Who has died with a thousand mesas  
in his throat

Skin wrapped around rifles  
Voice wrapped in mothballs

She sits in Federico's voice  
and starves

## RETURN OF THE CLIFF SWALLOWS

Swallows: We have come very far.  
Our wings pierced the sun  
to your ledges and crevices.

Canyon: Your return  
cuts deeper  
than the bulldozer's blade.

Swallows: We came back  
to build our nests  
and catch insects.

Canyon: My ribs  
are covered with cement  
and my blood is uprooted.

The cliff swallows  
darted  
before the canyon's eyes, looking for  
a ledge  
and insects.  
They found only cement.

Swallows: Our children  
are calling in our voice.  
Our children.

Canyon: The cast on my side  
is very tight.

Swallows: Help us find our old nests  
beating in these walls.

The swallows  
fell  
before the canyon's eyes, looking for  
nests  
and insects.  
They found only death.

VIEW  
OF  
MOSS  
LANDING

Blackbirds  
Slide  
Down  
Sand dunes  
On  
Their  
Tail feathers

Like  
The  
Moon  
Sliding  
Off  
My eyelids  
On  
The power plant's  
Steel girders

FROM AÑO NUEVO

ON THE BEACH

I count mornings  
of the merganser's  
white throat  
among my possessions.  
I become  
sunlight's concentration  
on that speckled breast.

The sky  
begins to swim  
around my elbows.  
Rocks wear the fog's collar.

A grey whale  
breaches,  
removing clouds from the sun.  
From his tail  
I see bits of a vacant lot  
overgrown with concrete.

FROM AÑO NUEVO

ON THE DUNES

The sun hovers above the fog.  
Scrutinizing  
spreading itself fan-like  
not yet sinking the talons  
not thrusting  
only herding the fog  
to break its neck  
on the shore.

I am there  
sweeping dampness  
into my pockets.

Willows are the breath  
of these dunes.  
Remove them  
we would be extinct.  
Wind could not forge us.  
Marsh hawks could not find  
mice  
under our ribs.

## THE ILLUMINATING FOG

On this rocky shore,  
with kelp beds hiding hermit crabs,  
with kelp in a bouquet of sea foam,  
the fog emerges,  
illuminating the orange anemone,  
fronds weaving the tide pools sleeve,  
their dark centers  
spotted with white teeth;  
fog of soft clay,  
molding cypress trees,  
and red lichen on the tree's bark;  
cold, breath of one colour,  
mirror of the horizon,  
on the tip of the loon's dark beak.

## PEBBLE BEACH

I walk along the trail  
shoes undone  
laces binding my vision  
separating me  
from the fog.

Close-by  
a pelican's bleached head  
turns  
in the fog's mouth.

Ocean's thin voice  
flaps  
like cloth around our bellies.

From the water  
harbor seals' obsidian eyes  
graze.

The sun leaks into the surf.

WALKING NEAR  
CABRILLO  
HIGHWAY

Morning light  
has grown  
lupines  
whose branches are home  
for Yellow Throats.

The light  
of headlights  
has grown  
agony  
on the lips of a deer.



## THE LIGHT ON THE SEA

The sea crosses me  
on a thousand blue ribbons

They are tied with boats  
on my temple and the horizon

The sun crosses the sea  
on a little Mew Gull

And the Pelican only crosses  
in the fog

The light plays parade with a million  
little glass hands on the sea