When I die, I want to be buried in a name,
some especially chosen, beautiful-sounding name,
so that its syllables will sing over my bones, near the sea.

–Pablo Neruda
I tried not to care anymore what your hammer built. What your truck carried. What you could see when you could see. The oil lamps stopped lighting the faces of the living. This is not living, you said. We were losing. We were too much for each other. I was no good for you and you were no good: they drew lines between us because you were forgetting, and I wrote things down, and this was no longer helpful: we were too much. We were too much for those who loved us. Didn’t you know it’d be easier if you just got better? I wanted to take the shears to you: cut out the softened brain, the evaporating bone. Do to you what I do to the poem.
1. Where the Dead Come to Speak

El Paso, Texas/Ciudad Juárez

in this way
could she

—Valerie Martínez

And maybe there was a Laurie Ann who left

behind three children, a sink full of dishes,

a man who kissed her as if the whole world

lived in her mouth. And maybe, too, her heart

was carved out from underneath the cradle
of her rib. The ocotillo motions

with its strange arms: death goes on. I conjure

you in bootsoles and sand, ice and humming

–bird, borderwalker and little girl.
Have you found my likeness on the other side,

I memorized your hands when I was six years old.

as I search for you here? I thought you’d be

alone. You are not alone. Hadn’t they

their own fathers to heed—saying, as mine

has said, don’t be alone, don’t cross the line?
You said, don’t be alone. Don’t cross the line, girl—the potential in my hands to raise hell, you knew before I did. We were never good
but to each other: the brain creates
its devil: in this dream, he makes me choose
which of us will die by the hand of the other
and which of us will carry the dead home:
You kill the boy or the boy kills you, he says.
In this dream, my steady hands are not my own:
your hands load the gun: you know I cannot
let him live: his bones cannot hold the weight
of me. With my eyes, I see your hands. My eyes
see the boy I birthed—my jaw that quivers.
You wake me before you pull the trigger.
Are you sure? Are you sure? I want to know how you know if a person is dead. I held your hand, watched you take what I thought was your last breath, but what do I know? I’ve never seen a person die before, and what if I was wrong? And maybe, if we pull you up, you’re gonna be pissed. What’s wrong with you? you’ll say to me like you do. What’s wrong with you—putting me down there like that? You could’ve killed me. The obituary makes me nervous. What if I was wrong? What if I was wrong when I said, he’s not breathing anymore? Maybe you were waiting. Maybe you were gathering your strength to say something, but they took you away, made me let go of your hand. And now you’re in the paper and I’ve fooled everyone into thinking you’re dead.