

# LENA CAMILLE OTALORA

Lena Camille Otolara (she/her) is a young writer and multimedia artist currently based in Boston, MA. Born and bred in Miami, FL, she developed a strong fixation with the ocean throughout her childhood--it became a source of amusement, awe, and unease alike. Eventually, the ocean's enigmatic image crept its way into her adulthood, insisting itself a motif. As in life, so in art; Lena Camille's work tends to focus on her generations-long relationship with the Atlantic ocean and the affairs of nature, emotion, and memory. She's acquired a BA from Boston University, having studied Film & TV Production and Comparative Literature, and lovingly tends to her houseplants in her downtime.

## *Atlantic*

I felt this groaning,  
groaning inside of me

lifting up in my ribs

shimmying and rattling,  
crafting a xylophone of my  
bones,  
turning over and punching  
at my chest  
wanting me to spill over, wanting  
to spill out

if only my skin could howl  
along with my soul  
at least then, perhaps I could cry  
at least then, a chorus we'd become  
am I allowed but  
a moan?

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are wails reserved alone  
for the holy spirit?

permit me a sadness  
all my own—  
if I am allowed to hold anything, let it be, at least, my tears

my mother's  
my grandmother's  
my grandmother,  
she swallowed hers whole

for no one to see—  
the taste, like a stone,  
smooth  
and hard and  
ever growing larger

I always knew the world began and  
ended with her, my Cronus,  
sickle in hand,  
poseidon in her belly  
the salt, the salt wearing at her throat—

tracking sand into the car,  
my toes curling, curling, curling,  
bringing the earth into me, feeling like I had seen the world,  
my muscles forgetting to let go of the waves—

I understand now, why  
she'd take me to the ocean

I had to learn the taste

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## *Man Went Down*

“All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was.”

Toni Morrison

we waited so long,

occupying ourselves with song,

lulling ourselves, preparing these muscles for the waves —

God's-a gonna trouble the water!

salty necks and baked shoulders

in exchange for damp feet —

Wade in the water

up to my calves, up to my knees

drudging ahead,

the soles of my feet opening up over rough stones,

making a Moses out of me

God's-a gonna trouble the water!

Yemanjá's womb

sighing to Us,

murmuring for me

Wade in the water

I bring my cowrie shells, nesting them in my hair,

nesting them in my eyes,

God's-a gonna trouble the water!

my eyes shine like alabaster in the sun,

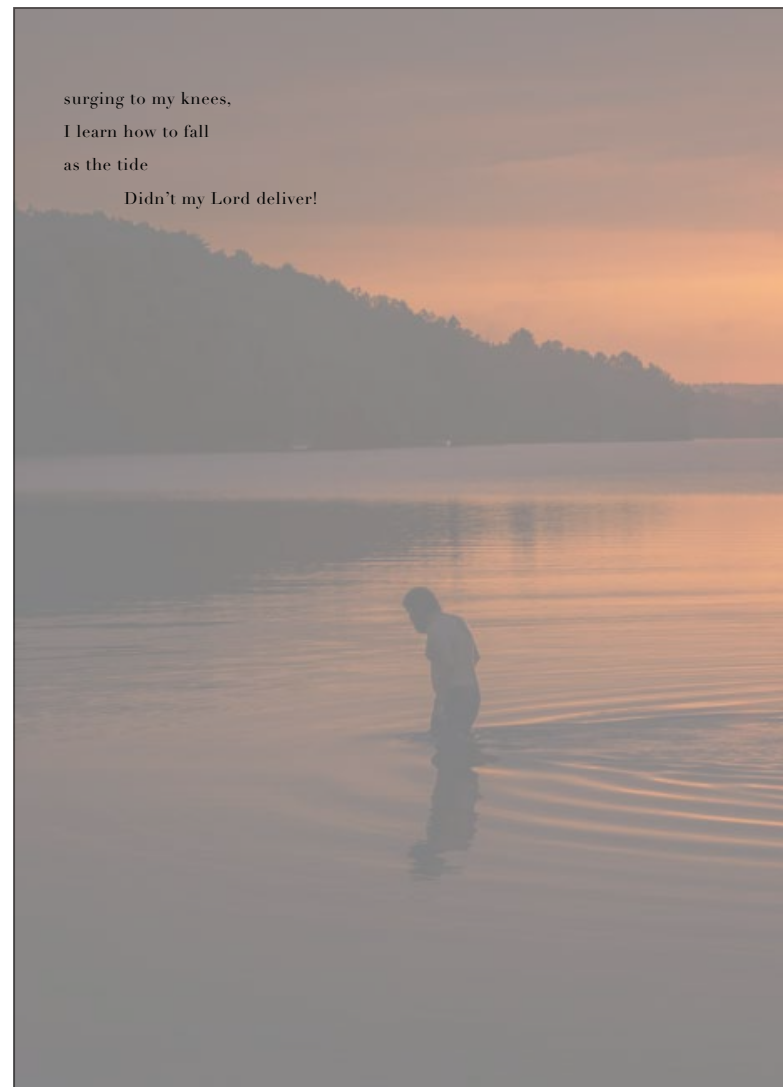
my whole body cloaked in pearly cloth,

delicate in the brine of baptism

Wade in the water

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surging to my knees,

I learn how to fall

as the tide

Didn't my Lord deliver!

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