#### Dar a Luz, a chapbook

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A poet and filmmaker, Brancato's literary awards include National Screenwriters, Organization of Black Screenwriters, WINFEMME, Chesterfield H. Jones Foundation, Poetry Guild, Faulkner, Asheville Writers Workshop, Pacific Northwest Writers, The Karlovy Vary Film Festival (Czech Republic), Houston Remi and Angelciti Film Festival awards. She has twice been a Sundance finalist.

Brancato has also been published by GSU Review, Georgetown Review, Natchez Anthology, The Writers Place Anthology, Litchfield Review, Rattle Magazine, Cycle Life Poetry, Southern California Anthology, Disconnections, and Lilly Press. She is a current nominee for Best of the Internet 2007 and a commissioned writer for artist Michael David's Greenhouse Project.

Brancato teaches screenwriting and poetry at the University of Southern California's Master of Professional Writing program. She earned her M.B.A. at the Harvard Business School and is a graduate of Hunter College and the Los Angeles Film School. She would like to thank poets Mary Stewart Hammond and Frazier Russell, playwright Spence Porter and husband Michael David for their encouragement and support.

## Dar a Luz

They've been going at it for days, for hours, for months, for years. He's on top whispering, weeping. She's tracing, scoring his cheek. He's breathing her lips. She's pinning her lips to his brow. It is nightfall. It is dawn. He turns his back to the wall. She raises her fists. He catches her wrists. She is withered, old. He is lime shell, bone, sucking, releasing her folds. She sips his scent. He splits her heart. She paints his face with a rose.

<sup>\*</sup> Dar a Luz, dare alla luce, means to give to the light, i.e. to give birth.

#### She Is

... a tramp in Beijing, a lady in Brussels, a red-lipped Burma bargirl in Patpong, a beggar-woman, tin cup tinkling on the brick outskirts of Rome. In Belize, in Cancun, she saunters past cardboard houses. She strips chile peppers, kicks stinking Mexican dogs. She wears bright shoes, no socks, no stockings. She wears no shoes, just socks, just stockings. She wears nothing, nothing at all. Her face is plain. Her face is pain. She wraps herself in his clothes. Her name is Leigh. Her name is Fiona. Her name is First Fine Moon. She prays. She loves. She weeps. She keeps. She holds men's hips, feeds frail lips, gives suckle by the light of her womb...

#### El Mozote Massacre, El Salvador

My name is Paolo. And I saw the soldiers -- taking the women first. Rags and all. Especially the young ones. The long-haired witches. Bending them over, raping them, the one we called the countess singing. Crooning through her locks. Alto voce to the end. The chorus of battered screams echoing in the cauldron.

At the parched oak table, I whittled a stick of pine. I was nine and pretended I had not lied, for I did not want to be left behind.

Carlos the Roman, my father's wrong-sided brother said, I do not want to kill the children. I watched him empty his magazine. Fool, said Rufino the cobbler, as he covered his ears. He danced like a madman in leathers, bare-toed, hopping toward the corner with a small boy, smaller than I. They will kill us all, Rufino admonished, chortling, pointing to Carlos. No beat missed, to the door Rufino strutted, pushing the laughing child into the ropes of the night, where already hung his mother and his father. Fool, he whispered then, grabbing the three-year-old by the waist, tossing him into the air, impaling him deftly on his bayonet. There was no blood, only the silent O of the child's white lips parting, like the skin of a fig. I watched him dancing, the boy's back arched in the moonlight, a soft breeze blowing aside the curtains.

Paolo! they called to me then, and my heart flipped-flopped, the sweet air stinking. Someone slapped my shoulder. Bring us a beer! they yammered. Let us see what they have to eat here. Rufino entered and I started to rise, but Carlos the Roman, weary-eyed, put a callused hand on mine and covered it. Leave him be, he cried, stopping my carving knife, the scalpel sinking deep, a gash of yellow for the figurine's slim face. After the last hungry man departed, he took me aside. Your father, he said -- that was all -- then he wiped his eyes.

We reached my new village in half a fortnight's time.

## Mistaken Identity

I dialed your number by accident. At first I didn't recognize your voice. It sounded happy. You were never happy. What a surprise, you said, to hear from you, and then I knew who it was, and laughed a bit, asked how our script was coming, the only asset we had in common. You wanted to talk. I didn't. You asked about my business. I'm a filmmaker now, I said. You had finally taken that law job. I found myself loving the sound of your voice, the memories of the way you watched me, naked, wanting, waiting for the flush. Oh, yes! We could have had that baby. I was climbing trees, hanging roses, swinging on vines. I was Eve before eating the apple in the land of never apart.

## Friend

```
making love to my almost husband
imagined you
though we've never
made love
you stood in the room
watching my un-
doing
him inside me
          me pretending
desire I
       so
       wanted
                     friend
       to once
              call out
       your name
```

## Snarky Aside

We are sitting up in bed, you and I, after a long week of fights and recriminations. I am wearing the blue terrycloth robe I bought you. You are wirelessly connected to the Internet, surfing for apartments to buy. We are talking money. I want yours, you want mine. Both of us want everything and nothing. There is enough for everything but not nearly enough for both of us, which is enough to finish everything. I hunker down curl up on my side, face buried in pillow, when you make that snarky comment meant to teach me not to have the feeling I am having. I long for the connection of your body, at least, but that too is denied.

# September 11th

Where did you go?
I rang your office on the 94<sup>th</sup> floor.
My heels used to catch just there, where we traded and kissed hip to hip, wrist to wrist.
A hole in the city half a mile wide.
Where?

Then you called.
I shook so hard I could not hold the phone.

#### Gloria

Today, watching the news on television, too tired to get out of bed, I got it,

that you were dead, buried these six or seven years, dead in your prime. You,

I said to myself, died, are dead, your body decomposing

in a coffin, under the earth, really dead.

I mean really, really dead like maybe you could be only half dead or partially dead

or not really dead at all just a little bit dead or sleeping like my memories of you

from years ago: pink lips, blond flowing hair, those sixties Pucci gowns you

used to wear twirling like a diva, the gravelly lilt of your voice.

So beautiful, so mockingly alive.

## Nothing more to say

Colin finds me

opening. at a gallery I'm still hurting, but I am also glad to see Colin. He sticks to his "I don't want to sleep with anyone I don't like sex" mode. I say to him: What is it then you actually liked about me? You don't like sex and you don't like closeness and you don't like talking and you don't like feelings or my job or apartment or even that I loved you. You don't seem to "like" anything at all about me. I am yelling. You don't like me, Colin. You never liked me. You may have fallen in love with me, but you don't like me! he is yelling back, I don't know what except it's not to say I am wrong, only to say how hurt he feels that I would say such a thing, because it is all about him now while I am completely heart bro ken.

#### A SHORT FILM IN 6 ACTS

#### 1. INT. Bedroom - Dawn

I wake without you. Cirrus clouds erase red skies. Rain pounds everything.

I cling to pillows, burrow into comforter, sheets, stick feet outside.

#### 2. INT. Kitchen - Day

A cup of coffee chills on my windowsill near Bill Lambért, my bear.

I draw African daisies. Endangered falcons. Sunny Central Park.

#### 3. EXT. Central Park - Dusk

Church bells ring, sirens wail, streets fill with passersby. My brush lies quiet.

I would paint the sky if it held you, dark clouds struck with purple moonlight.

## 4. EXT. Building – Night

Urban surf wanes and waxes. Taxis shuttle by, yellow beaked, black-footed.

I am crafting blocks stacking towers, stippling tanks, I can save cities.

## 5. INT. Head Shot – Paula's

Buildings topple fast. You run towards me, turn back, slip through a side window.

In the funhouse our heartbeats split, spin, flatline. You are gone.

6. INT. Ceramic soup bowl - Dawn

In thirty days it will be a new routine. Being without you.

Only oatmeal works. I tongue me off the clean cold spoon, curved, slick, seamless.

#### Nana Rose

Before I could walk Rose, my grandmother, taught me how to cook pasta sauce in her kitchen next door. I remember my grandmother

bent over boiling pots, large as her hips, wooden spoons stained red, her arms stirring, letting me climb on the stool and kneel, tall as her,

to hold her hand -- her emerald ring -- still stirring. Sometimes she would say, "We need more basil, Po-la-la", or oregano, stirring

the lamb, the sausage, the pork chop and basil into the foaming broth. Rose made soups too, lentil, chicken, green pea, letting me slice in basil

along with tiny strips of mint, red lentil beans, torn green scallion and thick crushed carrot. The octopus was what I liked most, near the lentil

bag from Gristede's in the bath - not to rot, the bathroom had no plumbing. The octopus' neck and arms draped over the shower bar. "Buffo",

my cousins would call, and she was, the octopus, a harlequin, her specked gray tent door swinging. When I was twelve I made Christmas dinner, octopus

and six other fish, each dish Sicilian, swinging my hips like my grandmother. I cut cakes at the table, dinner ended, my right hand swinging

the butter knife, sinking it straight into a cake's soft core, while Nana Rose sang Italian praises of banana chocolate sauce and the cake's

sweet marble folds. Now the plum-green Italian hothouse tomatoes I planted late last summer, blossom overgrown. Only the Italian

melody of her voice from that warm, summer corner remains, cracked ruby-rosin on old cassette tape - my interview her last summer. "In heaven?" she says, "Bah! I'm not so old! There is no heaven, Po-la-la! I tell you." Bending, I uproot an asparagus shoot, an old

stalk gone to seed. "To sew, you sew. To cook, you cook," Nana Rose's voice cracks. I unweave the asparagus crowding my lemon basil. "You

roll," she says, "the ravioli shells flat, then weave in each a spit of water." Here her inflection rises and a sharp knife clicks through the weave

of kitchen clatter. "Salt", she mutters, her inflection sharp. "Basta, Po-la-la! Basta!" She cupped her hand over mine, I remember. She tastes in reflection.

She sniffs. She weighs. Only silence from my recorder. "A bay leaf," she snaps, "and green pepper, Po-la-la. The way your grandpapa ordered."