

Paseo

By Susan Keller

Spanish noun meaning passageway; related to the verb pasear, to stroll or pass through

I lie in fleshy, humid sheets
wrapped inside stagnant hours,
a hostage of the boundless night

I cannot sleep
I cannot eat, my body withers
An ulcer, right? Simple to cure?

The doctor peers at me over her glasses,
calculating the vastness of my vulnerability with cool, mathematical certainty.
Prozac, Zoloft, Wellbutrin leave me dry mouthed and nauseous

The doctor shakes her head.
The meds aren't working. I've had good results with ECT.
You won't remember a thing.

Numbed past suffering, I awaken from an electrical sleep
and shuffle among the other seekers through the keening ward.
I fall in love with the tender man who slumps in a chair

And two or three times an hour, he raises his head and calls out hopefully,
"Everybody. Everybody."
"I am here," I tell him. In the *paseo* of the lost and wounded. *I am here.*

A gentle woman bathes me; a patient man tells me it is Tuesday or Sunday.
So much kindness
For a week or a month, I swirl in the surging currents

Until this night, when a *paseo* appears,
an iridescent trail that gleams like a string of pearls or vertebrae in the moonlight,
a way home toward the floating dawn.

Susan Keller enjoyed a 30-year career as an award-winning medical writer. Keller, whose poetry has won prizes in regional and national contests, has a degree in Public Health and Immunology from UC Berkeley. Publications include *Blood Brother: A Memoir* and presentations at Dominican University on Writing and Healing and Stanford Medical Center; that talk “Why My Oncologist Still Calls Me Her Miracle Patient” can be found on susankeller.com. Keller also blogs for Psychology Today and CURE Magazine.

