

RICHARD BLANCO

## Until We Could

I knew it then, in that room where we found for the first time our eyes, and everything—even the din and smoke of the city around us—disappeared, leaving us alone as if we stood the last two in the world left capable of love, or as if two mirrors face-to-face with no end to the light our eyes could bend into infinity.

I knew since I knew you—but we couldn't...

I caught the sunlight pining through the shears, traveling millions of dark miles simply to graze your skin as I did that first dawn I studied you sleeping beside me: Yes, I counted your eyelashes, read your dreams like butterflies flitting underneath your eyelids, ready to flutter into the room. Yes, I praised you like a majestic creature my god forgot to create, till that morning of you suddenly tamed in my arms, first for me to see, name you mine. Yes to the rise and fall of your body breathing, your every exhale a breath I took in as my own wanting to keep even the air between us as one.

Yes to all of you. Yes I knew, but still we couldn't...

I taught you how to dance *Salsa* by looking into my Caribbean eyes, you learned to speak in my tongue, while teaching me how to catch a snowflake in my palms and love the grey clouds of your grey hometown. Our years began collecting in glossy photos time-lining our lives across shelves and walls glancing back at us: Us embracing in *some* sunset, more captivated by each other than the sky brushed plum and rose. Us claiming *some* mountain that didn't matter as much our climbing it, together. Us leaning against columns of ruins as ancient as our love was new, or leaning into our dreams at a table flickering candlelight in our full-mooned eyes.

I knew *me* as much as *us*, and yet we couldn't...

Though I forgave your blue eyes turning green each time you lied, but kept believing you, though we learned to say good morning after long nights of silence in the same bed, though every door slam taught me to hold on by letting us go, and saying *you're right* became as true as saying *I'm right*, till there was nothing a long walk couldn't resolve: holding hands and hope under the street lights lustering like a string of pearls guiding us home, or a stroll along the beach with our dog, the sea washed out by our smiles, our laughter roaring louder than the waves, though we understood our love was the same as our parents, though we dared to tell them so, and they understood.

Though we knew, we couldn't—no one could.

When the fiery kick lines and fires were set for us by our founding mother-fathers at Stonewall, we first spoke *defiance*. When we paraded glitter, leather, and rainbows made human, our word became *pride* down every city street, saying: *Just let us be*. But that wasn't enough. Parades became rallies—bold words on signs and mouths until a man claimed freedom as another word for marriage and he said: *Let us in*, we said: *love is love*, proclaimed it into all eyes that would listen at every door that would open, until *noes* and *maybes* turned into *yeses*, town by town, city by city, state by state, understanding us and the woman who dared say *enough* until the gavel struck into law what we always knew:

Love is the right to say: *I do* and *I do* and *I do*...

and I do want us to see every tulip we've planted come up spring after spring, a hundred more years of dinners cooked over a shared glass of wine, and a thousand more movies in bed. I do until our eyes become voices speaking without speaking, until like a cloud meshed into a cloud, there's no more you, me—our names useless. I do want you to be the last face I see—your breath my last breath,

*I do, I do* and will and will for those who still can't

vow it yet, but know love's exact reason as much as they know how a sail keeps the wind without breaking, or how roots dig a way into the earth, or how the stars open their eyes to the night, or how a vine becomes one with the wall it loves, or how, when I hold you, you are rain in my hands.

In 2013, **Richard Blanco** was chosen to serve as the fifth Presidential Inaugural Poet of the United States. Richard was born in Madrid and immigrated to the United States as an infant with his Cuban-exile family. His works include *City of a Hundred Fires* (1998), which won the Agnes Starrett Poetry Prize; *Directions to the Beach of the Dead* (2005), winner of the PEN/American Beyond Margins Award; *Looking for the Gulf Motel* (2012), winner of the Maine Literary Award and the Paterson Prize; *One Today* (2013); *Boston Strong* (2013); *For All of Us, One Today: An Inaugural Poet's Journey* (2013); and *The Prince of Los Cocuyos: A Miami Childhood*, winner of the Lambda Literary Award for memoir.