

## Two Poems by Marina Romani

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### So Close

If I'd killed him, I'd never again  
find pleasure in speed in the dark.

What made him step out  
from that sly side street,  
the one that loops out  
from a still neighborhood  
straight to the on-ramp?  
It's a great one for bypassing  
traffic at rush hour.  
But for a man walking?  
There's nothing on the other side  
but the streaming freeway.

I'd been heading up Munras,  
lively avenue of intersections,  
stoplights, shoppers, and cars.  
But the hour was late,  
nothing much on the road,  
and the lights were all green,  
green disks aglow in the dark,  
lined up green-green-to-green,  
I cruising along, seeing the needle  
glide as I willed it to thirty-five, forty,  
till the last green glow was behind  
and I edged to fifty, moving uphill  
to the on-ramp looming ahead,

heady with power rush,  
when he stepped out.

A flash in the corner of my eye,  
man-shadow slipping through vision.

I hit the brake, the car swerved,  
he crossed and faded to darkness.  
I now slowed just enough to recover  
that skipped heartbeat, breathe in,  
say *thank you* to whatever power  
let me miss this stranger,  
then my foot was back on the gas.

And he?  
He must have heard my brakes  
and seen me swerve and skid.  
He must have known  
how close we came to meeting,  
how close he came to metal's touch.

He lives on,  
I don't know where or how.  
For me he's the lost shadow  
who glided swift and silent  
through my life one night.  
I'll never know his name.  
I never even saw his face.

I almost killed him.  
If I had, I'd never again  
find pleasure in speed in the dark.

## Flamenco

A fire glimmers in half-light,  
a guitar sighs through stillness,  
strings slice night's silence,  
a lone flame glows in the dark.

The strings strum and implore,  
and men's heels start to beat out  
old rhythms on hard ground  
as red flows through black

until She steps forward,  
stamping her heel, head tossed,  
river of hair flowing black,  
voice soaring through night.

It's the song of all nights sung long ago,  
of longing, desire, hot fires in the dark,  
flaming angers in star-light, the children  
all lost, loves found and discarded.

Heels beat, the ground shudders, throbs,  
strings stream to scarlet—till fire is spent,  
and a single guitar sighs through stillness  
as shimmers of red bleed to black.

**Marina Romani**, child of Russian émigrés, spent the first part of her childhood in wartime and civil-war China; those early years are the focus of *Child Interwoven*, a memoir in poem and prose she is currently preparing. Marina's recent work has been published in *Homestead Review*, *Porter Gulch*

*Review, Monterey Poetry Review, and the Tor House Newsletter.* Her poems have twice been finalists in the Central Coast Writers' annual writing contest.