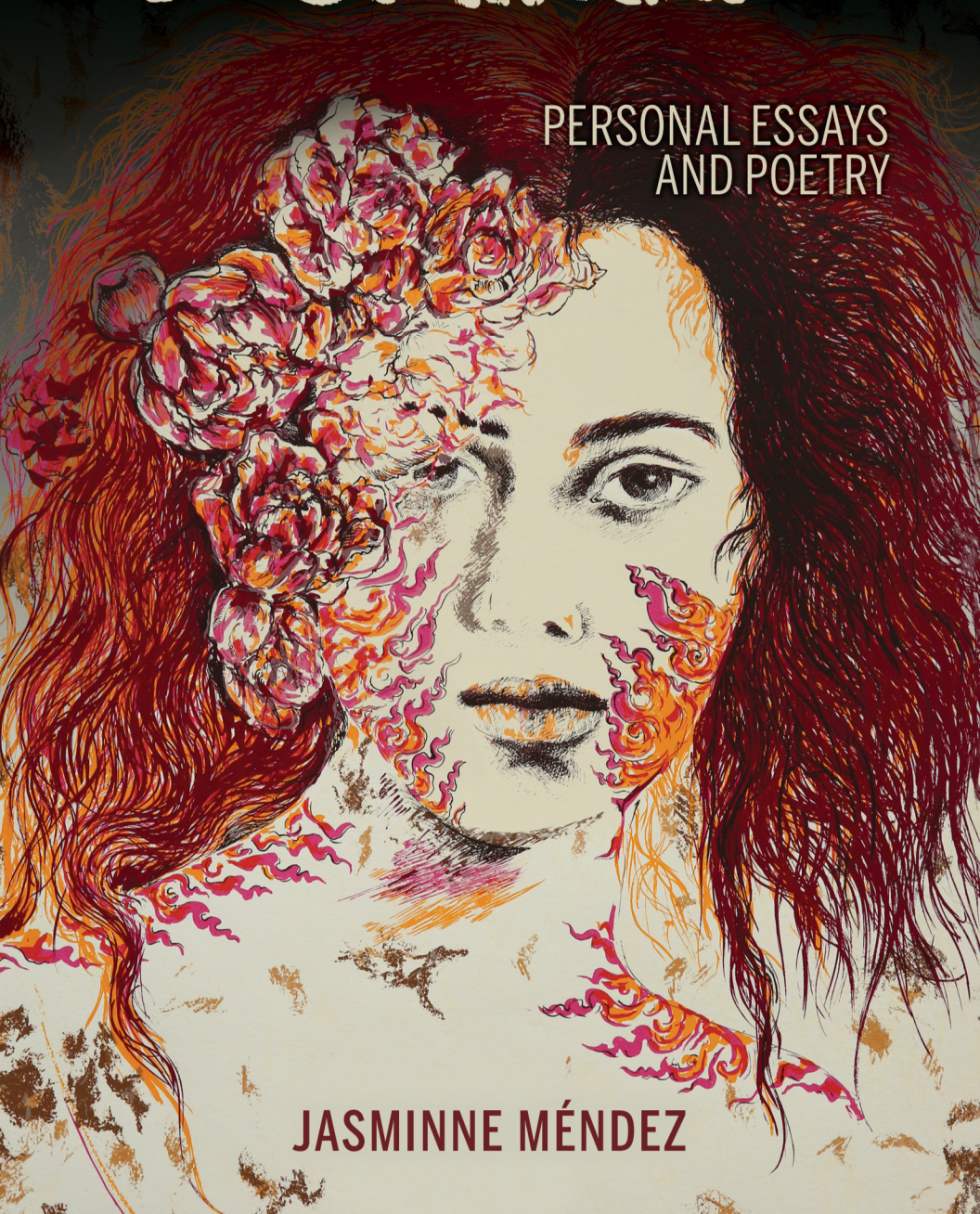


NIGHT-BLOOMING JASMIN(N)E

PERSONAL ESSAYS
AND POETRY



JASMINNE MÉNDEZ

Praise for *Night-Blooming Jasmin(n)e*

Through lyrical essays and pieces of poetry, Méndez offers a sharp and honest portrayal of what it means to navigate the strange corridors of being diagnosed with chronic illnesses as a young woman, to encounter the loss of a healthier self and some of the dreams that self might have once had, to reconcile the values and mindsets of her immigrant parents with the beliefs that are necessary to navigate life in the United States, and to be proud in one's Afro-Latina identity even if its location grounds it a geographic anomaly. Her stories are at once gripping and achingly generous as she lays her life bare and dissects what it means to be "Woman enough to wear the color of blood and fire without fear and without trepidation."

—Elizabeth Acevedo, author of *The Poet X*

Jasminne Méndez's words are at once incandescent and scathing. Her storytelling illumines the travails and the tenacity of a body bound to—and unbound by—place, illness and history. Her language fills in the synapses with the sweetness of mangoes, the soul of memory and an unflinching eye for witness. Her pages elucidate American intersectionality and bless all the overlooked songs.

—Barrie Jean Borich, author of *Apocalypse,
Darling* and *Body Geographic*

Growing up in Texas, the perspicacious child of Dominican immigrants, Jasminne Méndez seems unstoppable, even when adulthood presents its own set of challenges: a chronic illness, the anguish of pregnancy. The bigger she dreams, the harder it becomes to love her body in this world. But in her glorious book Méndez speaks her truth: an empowering journey of resilience, perseverance and the bittersweet wisdom that comes from being the woman who has had to "learn to suck the nectar out of sorrow."

—Rigoberto González, author of
What Drowns the Flowers in Your Mouth

Jasminne Méndez is a gift. End stop. In *Night Blooming Jasmin(n)e* you will find what no residency or workshop can teach: self-examination. Her writer's eye is unrelenting and compassionate. Where there are hereditary and genetic dispositions to blame, there are healings and epiphanies to celebrate. Using a fierce remedy of flash essays, personal narratives, poetry and musings, Méndez becomes our healer. Truly born of her blood, this debut is a beautiful achievement, a lasting testament to a spirit that emerged bruised, scarred but alive and ready to sing.

—Willie Perdomo, author of
The Essential Hits of Shorty Bon Bon

Jasminne Méndez's fearless debut, insists on two forms—straightforward, intimate first-person essays, interlaced with poems—as the modes necessary to write the rarity of her body urgently into existence: the Black Latinx body, the female body, the ill body, the infertile body. But also, beyond the fact of the body, the tender identities in-between: faithful daughter, brilliant student, brave patient, devoted wife, hopeful mother. These conversational, frank essays allow the reader into a life filled with love and family, but also incredible hardship, heartbreak and resilience. And the poems, woven wild as sprays of jasmine into the text, are, like the flower, sharp and flint-bright as stars, and vulnerable as its petals. Méndez is a bold, necessary voice from long-neglected intersections of experience. And, thank goodness, she has arrived.

—Vanessa Angélica Villarreal, author of *Beast Meridian*

NIGHT-BLOOMING JASMIN(N)E

PERSONAL ESSAYS
AND POETRY

JASMINNE MÉNDEZ



Arte Público Press
Houston, Texas

Night-Blooming Jasmin(n)e is funded in part by grants from the City of Houston through the Houston Arts Alliance, the National Endowment for the Arts and the Texas Commission on the Arts. We are grateful for their support.

Recovering the past, creating the future

Arte Público Press
University of Houston
4902 Gulf Fwy, Bldg 19, Rm 100
Houston, Texas 77204-2004

Cover design by Mora Design
Cover art by Esperanza Gama, “Mujer Fuego”
gamaesperanza@gmail.com

Names: Méndez, Jasminne, author.

Title: Night-blooming Jasmin(n)e : personal essays & poetry /
by Jasminne Méndez.

Description: Houston, TX : Arte Público Press, [2018]

Identifiers: LCCN 2017061347 (print) | LCCN 2018001715 (ebook) |

ISBN 9781518504907 (epub) | ISBN 9781518504914 (kindle) |

ISBN 9781518504921 (pdf) | ISBN 9781558858619 (alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Scleroderma (Disease) | Scleroderma (Disease)—
Anecdotes. | Pericardium—Diseases.

Classification: LCC RL451 (ebook) | LCC RL451 .M46 2018 (print) |
DDC 616.5/44—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017061347>

∞ The paper used in this publication meets the requirements of the American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

Night-Blooming Jasmin(n)e © 2018 by Jasminne Mendez
Printed in the United States of America

For Lupe: my amo, my hands, my hero, my heart

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Night-Blooming Jasmin(n)e | 1 |
|---------------------------------|---|

PART I: SPANISH JASMIN(N)E

| | |
|---|----|
| Loss | 5 |
| Independence | 7 |
| Exam Table | 13 |
| Diagnosis | 14 |
| Skin Score | 39 |
| Poet's Jasmin(n)e | 54 |
| Avalanche I | 59 |
| Hands Clean | 60 |
| When You Marry a Mexican American | 62 |
| Support Group | 65 |

PART II: RED JASMIN(N)E

| | |
|--|-----|
| First Trimester | 75 |
| One in Four | 76 |
| Baby M | 85 |
| Not Yet | 86 |
| Insanity | 88 |
| What to Expect When You're Not Expecting | 89 |
| Dar a Luz | 90 |
| How to Be Infertile | 92 |
| Open | 98 |
| Shades of Red | 99 |
| Waiting | 104 |

PART III: SUMMER JASMIN(N)E

| | |
|------------------------------|-----|
| Gluttony: Undigested | 109 |
| Hunger | 110 |
| Interruptions | 118 |
| Lupus | 121 |
| ER Visits | 122 |
| "Sick" Humor | 124 |
| Young, Pretty & Able | 132 |
| Stroke | 134 |
| Mouth Sores | 136 |
| Mo(u)rning Medications | 137 |
| Detours | 138 |
| Inflammation | 143 |
| Heart | 145 |

PART IV: WINTER JASMIN(N)E

| | |
|---------------------------|-----|
| Avalanche II | 155 |
| Hands: El Corte | 156 |
| Morir soñando | 161 |
| Hair | 163 |
| Massage Envy | 167 |
| Drop It | 169 |
| After the Avalanche | 171 |

PART V: TRUE JASMIN(N)E

| | |
|---------------|-----|
| Hope | 175 |
| (W)Hole | 185 |
| Health | 187 |
| Home | 198 |
| Haima | 203 |

| | |
|------------------------|-----|
| Hostility | 206 |
| Heridas | 211 |
| Heroine | 216 |
| Acknowledgements | 223 |
| Gracias | 225 |

NIGHT-BLOOMING JASMIN(N)E

| | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <i>This is the story</i> | <i>of Jasmin(n)e:</i> |
| common <i>Jasmin(n)e</i> | <i>Spanish Jasmin(n)e</i> |
| <i>red Jasmin(n)e</i> | sweet <i>Jasmin(n)e</i> |
| white <i>Jasmin(n)e</i> | <i>summer Jasmin(n)e</i> |
| princess <i>Jasmin(n)e</i> | <i>true Jasmin(n)e</i> |
| <i>Jasmin(n)e tongue</i> | <i>Jasmin(n)e breath</i> |
| <i>Jasmin(n)e skin</i> | <i>Jasmin(n)e hair</i> |
| <i>Jasmin(n)e flowers</i> | <i>blooming inside</i> |
| <i>a Jasmin(n)e heart</i> | |

PART I: SPANISH JASMIN(N)E

*We were plucked
from our homes
& planted on foreign soil.
Wild—we grow
& flourish anywhere.*

LOSS

I DON'T KNOW if I have the words I need to tell you everything I want to say. I don't know if I have enough creative impulses to get it all down on paper and truly convince you of my story. I don't really know where any of this is going. But I remember having dreams once. I remember believing in the impossible. I remember being someone else once. I don't know where she went. I think she died in the process. Between independence, diagnosis and disappointment, I've lost her somewhere. I tried to blame scleroderma. I tried to blame lupus. I tried to blame God. I tried to blame the world. But it's no one's fault. She couldn't take the pressure anymore. So she left.

The old me broke up with the new me and she left both of us broken-hearted. Imagine that, feeling the broken heart of two people at one time beating in your own chest. Grief becomes inevitable, depression a necessity.

I longed for the old me, like every lover does at the beginning of a separation. I went back to her time and time again. I begged for forgiveness. I promised to change. But nothing seemed to work. I spent hours and hours reliving her dreams, trying to believe in them again. But she and the dreams kept slipping away. I studied her face in old pictures and thought about how beautiful she was. I closed my eyes and remembered feeling safe and secure in her skin. I felt lost. I felt empty. I was afraid of being someone else. I had grown accustomed to her routine. She and I had wanted the same things before, had laughed at the same things before, believed in the same things

before. And yet, like every sad love affair that comes to an end, she left because what she needed and what I could give her no longer were the same, and the new me was left with the shattered pieces of a broken heart that didn't even exist.