

Piñata Theory

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For

Abigail & Francisco & Monica & Ignacio & Aldo & Sasha & Gary & Lala & Yayo &
Kristian & Sophia & Serge & Lalita & Adrian & Carlos & Sergio & Raymundo & Lois
& Teresa & Briana

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Psychoanalysis of a Piñata

The fault line between me runs north

from south, a zag

splitting my skull and bursting
my edges. These ribs are ridges

rubbing dangerous—

friction
to make worlds
shake with color. There is movement
within—

these earthquakes
my unfinished

therapy. I make sweetness
out of fractures, make fire

dance from teeth,
my shape

an ash-bound phoenix. Tonight

I live to be undone—

Translations from the Backseat of a Colectivo in Oaxaca

We jump into the cab and suddenly we're moving somewhere and somehow silence becomes the driver talking mezcal and illegal rooster fights, and he is telling Adrian about a party in Mitla tomorrow night, where *la raza se pone a pistear*, where you drink the hours away until you fall into a stranger's house, and the next morning you wake up to watch the men playing *fút, pero bien crudo*. His instructions: take a shot, then down your beer, then rinse it with mezcal before blowing the smoke from your mouth. Just like that. And if you can still stand and chase the soccer ball rolling across a dirt field faster than locals, you've mastered something. *Así que tienes que entrenar por un año* until you gain the gut-strength required to last around here. And I'm watching the desert, or maybe the desert is watching me, but either way we are speeding past adobe, past fields of maguey, past a valley where this compa tells us the pumas will hunt you if you stray too far off at night. I don't see any pumas, only signs of *Yaguar Xoo* and *Tlacolula*, pointing to nowhere I've been. And Adrian tells us about the time he crossed a desert, somewhere above Arizona, beneath a mirror of his country. How his dad, Niceforo, was detained on one side, his eyes bordered with questions. They exchanged a wad of cash and *don't-be-afraids* that night to get past the hours separating darkness from more darkness. The story doesn't end there but the driver doesn't stop talking about Zapotec ruins, about the teachers who fired up a strike until they were struck down, about petrified waterfalls we should visit. *La ciudad de los muertos* he calls it, where they harvest the best-tasting fruits you won't find anywhere else. He laughs, we'd need more than this lifetime to find what's in these mountains, these majestic bones. I'm in the middle, speechless, listening. I'm learning how to touch my mouth without being swallowed. I am opening. The story doesn't end there.

Reading Autobiographies

The summer I was saved I was sitting
on cobblestone steps in Xalapa
while Massive Attack played inside

my headphones, Sasha beside me
as a family of clouds lazed
above the Catholic church steeple

at the center of the town's zócalo,
where abuelas came to pray
and tourists came to photograph

flowers that smelled like after-sex
in spring, the same place my brother
tripped while running and split

skin against rock, his knee a mangle
of flesh and fat, deeper than anything
I'd ever seen, a reminder to never

disobey when Ma tells you to stop
running, and then you grow up
and understand, but back then

we only understood crying
like thunderstorms that loomed
each night, a polyrhythm duet of tin

roofs and tropical rain like we never heard
in California—the same summer
I read Kody Scott's autobiography, a Crip

who crept with OGs inside Cadillacs
bluer than any nightfall I'd ever known, aiming shotguns
at boys who looked like him, only neighborhoods apart.

Some of Our Boyhoods

Praise the older cousins, the Felipes who introduced us to untouchable things: Lauryn Hill's voodoo

and the deep mouth of Nas; the rebel
thumb-flicks of a chrome Zippo; scenes in *Full Metal Jacket*

when the soldier explodes his own
face off, before prostitutes

zombie in the darkness promising *we love you long time*.
Where we got our cool from, pretended like we knew

what good weed smelled like, how to slide a condom on.
Back then, everything was a series of pretending until we weren't

pretending anymore. By 8th grade we stopped
doing homework and raising our hands, instead cutting

class and cracking jokes about the Holocaust
in the back row of history. No one

to tell us *do your work* or *don't say that*
at home. We'd just punch and wrestle and shoot

bb guns until birds dropped from the air, heavy with blood.
The time Jumbo's dog chewed up a kid's hamster and after

the boy cried, Jumbo told him to stop being *a fuckin' fag*.
We couldn't watch the hamster's slow unfolding

so found the biggest rock in the yard.

Speech Cantos

I am the tongue

transmuted—the chatter of cousins

I haven't seen since elementary

when the world was still our widest

kaleidoscope. In Xalapa

we ran games under corrugated roofs,

ran fingers through silver-fished rivers,

ran mouths until they filled with pambazos

from tía Gracia's kitchen, a bigger-than-other-houses

house of Chazaros, with dirt

driveways and white walls to keep us in.

The same place Spanish outgrew me at ages 2, 6, 16, 22, 33

the clumsy growth

of my limbs, the spillage

of syllables.

Remind me: how does one's music

become another's wreckage?

Say what you can't: there will always be a Felipe

to mock my accent—

more American than having Jason Kidds on my feet.

More American than our toothpaste

suburb. More American than my sangre. Out of twelve

my dad was the first who flighted North.