

Once a Month My Father Brought KFC Home for the Family

Gumming the cartilage clicks and pops
my abuela would eat the bones if she
could
stomach full of falling rope
the pit distance across the table a hunger she
made for us to not know under porches
dogs in gutters voodoo eyeing her reverie's
stolen handfuls of communion wafers dark
quiver girl drunk the pail oiled
hours of nights orphan of bruised fish and
plantations
purpling in the strange Caribbean
alchemies of summer tell me of its
bursting maggots
dumpster phoenix from what
you are
from elsewhere
To get far away from what
I could not imagine
was it what she wanted when
I looked upon her then
as Trujillo white powder on his
caramel face must have looked upon his
half Haitian mother half disgusted
I have inherited much she inherited only
the appetites of the absent
dead at this table
I see
their knotted stomachs in her
side-eye iron sights
arcing
towards the island my plate
...so aristocratic in its waste
hay
mas carne she says there
is still meat

on the bones
she is
blessing
my body as once
at dinner
a mulatto soldier held
a sprig of parsley
and an iron rifle in her father's mouth
and demanded
to know what it was
demanded him to say what it was
that was in his thieving Haitian mouth swore he was Dominican —*zambo*:
the click and pop.
Come
she gestures,
greased drumstick in hand, *eat and thank Jesus*
I am still here and
if it is a death we must baptize
in this stomach into shit it is holy
Christ you holy cannibal look at her
arthritic hands twist and snap the wings
with muscular grace
her jowls shaking like a reverend on fire
from
her august lips
emerged the chicken bones
cleaned off white
as ashen doves not a pearl
of flesh left was nothing
for sin to soil
what consecration
she tongues the marrow

Selections From the *Decade of Faces with Arcadia*

IV: Puerto Rico to Port St. John

Through sepia windows they stare into the present
all my impossible abuelos in a photo album
Tilina ‘shining one, tiny waist’ they called her
between adolescences and their fathers’ coats
—“TINA!” screams my grandfather, which always means:
‘bring me what I want.’ Old marine umbiliculled
to an oxygen tank —her name is Aracelis,
she taps a cigarette in his direction and crosses
the aisle. Through the window, where the sun pulls the sweat
from migrants towards the shore — to no one
in particular I might ask: *if I might have not been me could*
I then have been you? —diamonds on their dirty brows
los sleepwalkers she calls them, we watch them, every summer
climb ladders into houses without ceilings

XIII: Arcadia

Determinism is the theory that at Abuela’s family reunion
when all mouths are full of rum-cake
then Rafi (even after he died) and his battered guitar
will apparate from a cloud of musk cologne and
cigar smoke
he will smile somehow at all of us
and begin a merengue
Don Jose bird chirps clave
the stabs of latin brass
the spanish lancers from an
unseen red accordion
regardless of having
heard it before we all know how it goes
Rafi

pulls islands
a pangea of faces: maps the same
Hispaniola from different eras mislabelled *India* and *Puerto Rico*
women swim to the children's table
we gaze into their delphis *I held you when you*
were a baby we lie:
I remember but it's not *really* a lie
we will know how they believed us
when we see our own sugar cane nephew nieces
etc. are no longer babies but growing fast
as if they've got somewhere to be
between bolero and bacchusian bachata the dominoes clink and fall
the salad of old potato men
spill their drinks they wink a deal:
a beer in return for a kaleidoscope
cliches leading to a single point
the one secret to a good life each promises it
to you if you only listen but that point
never arrives
we wonder what secrets
bald under their arcane fedoras what sacred bird was terrored
or shot for the tropical feathers in their leather bands?
if it was a drunk parrot did it speak in Iberian or Taino?
would this symbol be ours one day?
always one step before their conclusions they have no choice
but to surrender
in witness to the dance of daughters
unweaving a city of violets from their blouses
(these ones —unpluckable) as one fabric
they look at the men
white hems lifting
this time through their own will they forget
about trying to forget *what did not have to be* or is it
when the last chord leaves up so too the women
rise
sail up through the ceiling
before anyone has a chance

to grasp them
not women now but
a single voyage
we see last the
the callused moons of their bunions
their clothes
fall
without them and
land on
on moorish tiles
perfectly folded
beside curlers, mops, and
cleaning supplies

Dark S.U.V.

I tell him writing a good poem...is like
 leading tourists through a wild forest

don't leave them stranded in the middle of it;
 you have to find a way out
 or at least make a garden...

For example: two roads diverge
 25km west of the Polish border with Belarus
 littered with frozen shoes unsoled—

do not look—keep looking and that boy beneath the pine
is ■ sleeping— though

round the wind flouts numb the soleless shoes through
 your marrow, it is so cold
 but I promise (promised a way out)

 the border patrol camera proves there is still heat in you.

§
Menthol splash and
aftershave before Al Jazeera
—*Once his country was a red wheelbarrow*
a young man in a broken puffer *he carried*
his younger brother—
sits inside
the 24 hours news cycle

Wędrzyn Detention Center

—*beneath the rubble*—

and his head is so heavy

he has to hold

it in his hands —*what couldn't be*

separated The reporter says *from tomatoes, what*

remains —

what

remained of his *to carry to his mother*

the reporter negotiates

in a plastic bag

he needs psychological help;

