



Codex Hogar
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“Why should love stop at the border?”
— Pablo Casals

Uno

You'd think
a desert teemed with heat, churned
volcanic with dusted daylong baking: precious
little warmth beneath the pyramid of night those hard
Christmas eves: we gathered before a kerosene heater burning
within its glass tower, blanketed and huddled on bare floors with the dogs
in chemical smell not at all like pine boughs: and aunts who did not dec-
orate trees,
exhausted from long days working American bowling alleys, American
tuna canneries, smoking
and giving us American gifts that my father would not allow: a teddy bear
was not a gift for a Mexican
boy – and my aunt taking it back and giving me instead a cheap plastic
pinball game I did not want, but
received in a stoic fashion though years later, all of them dead, I wish I
had that ridiculous Woolworth's
bear
to remember
anything soft
from that world
before the walls
loomed
over us.

*

Dos

Your house might have perched on the side of a hill
miles south of the border, whatever that was. Somewhere
up there by the riverbed. Past the sidewalks where spray-
painted donkeys played the roles of zebras



for beer-drinking Americans calling everyone “Pancho” and “Mamacita.” You could have been a child who thought wonderful things: that Americans were always drunk and were the ones who wore big sombreros, that zebras came from Mexico. You might have been a skinny girl whose name meant “Daisy” in translation. A girl who lived in that house perched on that hill, where the neighbors had outhouses and tuberculosis, but a girl whose roof looked out across a small canyon to the city and its dusty trees with whitewashed trunks and gazebos with old men too fat to button their uniforms and too slack to blow their trumpets well, but their bleating as sour as tamarind juice was somehow beautiful with the sounds of old buses and police whistles and the ten thousand insouciant street dogs barking at children playing soccer in the park. You might even have had that girl’s mysterious power to hold out her fingers and attract wild birds to tumble from the sky and grip her knuckles as if they were her feathery rings. And you might have seen when the family went to a rare restaurant meal together the poor people from some dark South begging on the street called Revolution. Seen how all modern nations only love dead Indians and make their ghosts tales of noble mystics who are played in films by handsome Italians and Mexico City rich kids in spray tans and \$5,000 wigs, but send machine cavalries after their living children: four-wheel drive Hemi horses chasing Aztecs and Mayas and harrowing them to pens in Wonderland. You might have walked beside my cousin with her birdy fingers, and my aunt, after that plastic American Christmas, smoking her Newports like a power station burning cheap sulfury coal, already seeding the cancer in herself, and the living *India* standing outside the chicken diner as beautiful as anyone I had ever seen. Seeking alms like a gospel sojourner. Almost black, she was – braids brilliant in that winter sun, rebozo over her shoulder and slinging her dark child at long breast, suckling in the long smoky crèche of the avenue – and my aunt suddenly turning on her



and kicking her
and shouting,
“Dog!
Get away from us!”
You might have felt the world,
like we children did, spin away and become something
made of iron
and bullets

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Tres

You'd think a desert
would be hot. But
away from sight
there were beds
made of paper
in boxes of cardboard
on hilltops of wraiths
and ghost walkers
where gulls haunted
the sleep of dogs
too old and sick
to run the streets
where trucks
dropped all the
broken things
both countries
threw at the border
like toys like boots
like plastic chairs
like cans of peaches
like televisions like
laptops like tables
like porn magazines
like Bibles like rotten



fish like run-over cats
like rabid raccoons like
worn-out zebras like
canisters of blood
from abortion clinics
like underwear like
burning horses
and Indians
from impossible lands
where it stayed hot
but trucks came
at any hour
and the sound of engines
meant dying time
had come 'round again
and there was nothing left
to eat
those Indians
slept on plastic
spread over mud
in the boxes
and blessed America
for the old blankets
born-again conquistadors
dropped from above
and their babies
coughed in the night
because they had never
felt such cold
as they found in the shadow
of the Great Wall
coughed until blood
fell from their lips
fell like beads
from some ancient raiment
and I know
because I was there



the year fourteen
of these small ones
died
on Christmas Eve
on a hill
where their mothers
could watch
the lights of California
where it was always warm
and where kings in golden planes
moved around the brilliant
hive like
magnificent
wasps.