

Marianela Medrano

HAM AND CHEESE



On my father's back, in borrowed clothes, I came to America.

Li-Young-Lee

My father lost in the streets of New Jersey
plants the memory that I now invent
It is the summer of 1969
he walks through these lines
that I fold like a precious cloth
Orders a ham and cheese sandwich
(four years in a row)
Then
green salad:
(El Cibao's roads where nostalgia returns)
Black coffee:
(without the melodious sugar the rest does not occur here)

Slow shadow my father walks in the ink
Looks puzzled (at me and my memory)
I am five
The slam that separates us hurts me
I learn to write my name

What am I doing in the hidden shame of my father?
I cross Paterson's deserted streets
holding on to his photograph

In the apartments
makers of dreams live like a beehive
I fiddle with the idea of a wide world that spills over
On these streets walked
full of live Allen Ginsberg's corpse
Enthusiastic
inflated by hope I start to

embroider new images
on the cloth where my father inscribed
factory
 sweat
 invisibility
 ham and cheese
 ham and cheese
 ham and cheese
 ham and cheese...

I continue embroidering as if I were not doing anything
Allen Ginsberg and I face-to-face
nothing separates us now
we speak the same language
I read to him a desolation poem
he smiles with imperfect teeth
We are comrade Allen and I

On the other corner
Imposing
powerful Doña Aída embroiders my name
so everybody knows that I have arrived
so I remember it

Solitude feels heavy
My father arrives from the factory lost in sweat
He comes reciting a poem
reclaiming Manhattan's streets
The streets of any town I walk
He is holding me by the hand
I am no sure if it is he
Or is you
Whom I profoundly love right now Allen

Why do I mess with the memory
my father dissolved?
Ham and cheese I was saying
Ham and cheese
(four years in a row)
Invisible
While I learned how to write my name

I come holding the hand of Allen Ginsberg
hand of my father
hand of Doña Aída
my hand
embroidering on the wide cloth of this country that spills over
so used to borrowed clothes

The clear mirror of multiple identities
fuses my father and me
(he has sword never to leave El Cibao
I continue to bring him in the memory)

He takes off his left shoe
uncovers the place where before
his longest toe united us
it has been amputated to save his life
I grab the simile
I know why this memory is coming
Meager dark flesh
on which I travel to New Jersey

Something starts to disperse
spills over
inundates the apartments
where dream makers live
I leave knowing where I am going
I learn to walk with sandals
holding onto my absent father's arm
Vulnerable
raw flesh we love each other even more

I find myself in the streets of New Jersey
Then go back home
—home invented between nostalgia and forgiveness—
Here I plant the memories
my son will invent later on
Allen Ginsberg's phantom comes to visit my garden
the good poet even dares to question me
I smile
and read a poem that speaks of return
juggler return like the one of Li-Young-Lee
We both know how to travel on a back
wide
robust (despite time)
We both know the secret of the meager dark flesh
rotten meat that keep us vital
We are voices that know where silence comes from
Voices that rise across time
We the children of memory
Travelers with roots
Travelers with roots
Travelers with roots
Travelers with roots
inventors of memories