

*Afro-Latina* by Elizabeth Acevedo

Afro-Latina,  
Camina conmigo.  
Salsa swagger  
anywhere she go  
como  
'la negra tiene tumbao!  
¡Azúcar!  
Dance to the rhythm.  
Beat the drums of my skin.  
Afrodescendant,  
the rhythms within.  
The first language  
I spoke was Spanish.  
Learned from lullabies  
whispered in my ear.  
My parents' tongue  
was a gift  
which I quickly forgot  
after realizing  
my peers did not understand  
it.  
They did not understand me.  
So I rejected  
habichuela y mangú,  
much preferring Happy Meals  
and Big Macs.  
Straightening my hair  
in imitation of Barbie.  
I was embarrassed  
by my grandmother's  
colorful skirts  
and my mother's  
eh brokee inglee  
which cracked my pride  
when she spoke.  
So, shit, I would poke fun  
at her myself,  
hoping to lessen  
the humiliation.  
Proud to call myself  
American,  
a citizen  
of this nation,  
I hated  
Caramel-color skin.

Cursed God  
I'd been born  
the color of cinnamon.  
How quickly we forget  
where we come from.  
So remind me,  
remind me  
that I come from  
the Taínos of the río  
the Aztec,  
the Mayan,  
Los Incas,  
los Españoles  
con sus fincas  
buscando oro,  
and the Yoruba Africanos  
que con sus manos  
built a mundo  
nunca imaginado.  
I know I come  
from stolen gold.  
From cocoa,  
from sugarcane,  
the children  
of slaves  
and slave masters.  
A beautifully tragic mixture,  
a sancocho  
of a race history.  
And my memory  
can't seem to escape  
the thought  
of lost lives  
and indigenous rape.  
Of bittersweet bitterness,  
of feeling innate,  
the soul of a people,  
past, present and fate,  
our stories cannot  
be checked into boxes.  
They are in the forgotten.  
The undocumented,  
the passed-down spoonfuls  
of arroz con dulce  
a la abuela's knee.

They're the way our hips  
skip  
to the beat of cumbia,  
merengue  
y salsa.  
They're in the bending  
and blending  
of backbones.  
We are deformed  
and reformed  
beings.  
It's in the sway  
of our song,  
the landscapes  
of our skirts,  
the azúcar  
beneath our tongues.  
We are  
the unforeseen children.  
We're not a cultural wedlock,  
hair too kinky for Spain,  
too wavy for dreadlocks.  
So our palms  
tell the cuentos  
of many tierras.  
Read our lifeline,  
birth of intertwine,  
moonbeams  
and starshine.  
We are every  
ocean crossed.  
North Star navigates  
our waters.  
Our bodies  
have been bridges.  
We are the sons  
and daughters,  
el destino de mi gente,  
black  
brown  
beautiful.  
Viviremos para siempre  
Afro-Latinos  
hasta la muerte.

Works Cited

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