

Lindsay tells me that the recording was made in a basement, and that right after they finished taping the song, the drummer's beer tipped over onto the amp. I ask her how on earth she remembers that. She says she has no idea. I write this down in my notebook: both the story, and the uncertainty of its recounting. We finish our wine.

(When I first encountered you, I imagined you were a gap or a wound. That I, too, could be a suture. Ha! But, oh, S, we only pretend to be obsessed with closure.)

When I get home, I set the notebook onto the shelf in my office, the one that's filled with books from S's library. The shelf is piling up with other things, too: a box of S's plastic jewelry from Lindsay, a stack of her trinkets from Pam. On the phone with another of S's friends, Richard, he asks if I have a sense of a timeline for this research. I say *I'm not sure it has a conclusion*. He agrees, *no, it could go on and on*. He says I'll have to decide when it's over.

I let myself imagine a fire that engulfs my office. Everything goes up in smoke. Within minutes, the whole archive is ash. S dislodges from the in-between. She turns to smoke. She swirls, and then she dissipates.

The other day, Yasmine says, *I love archives*; she says, *I love to dream of archives burning*. We laugh and laugh. I call an electrician to check on the outlet. He can't figure out what has caused it to melt. He installs a replacement. I ask him if it's OK to use my space heater now. He says he thinks so. He says I should try it, then check on it every few hours to make sure it's not overheating. I joke that I want him to promise me that it will never catch fire, that nothing bad will ever happen. He chuckles. He says I'll just have to wait and see. I say *I love to wait*.⁴

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Everything Remains Still

I

“What are you doing tomorrow?” B asks while packing her stuff.

“I don't know... Why?”

She looks at me, confused.

“It's Thanksgiving!”

“Oh, yeah, right... nothing... just staying at home... do some work.”

An awkward silence and then a smile (I recognize the smile: it pops up on *their* faces every time they see the opportunity to solve something.

“Well...”

⁴ NOTE: certain names have been changed to respect privacy.

I interrupt her before she decides to invite me to her family dinner:

“It’s okay... we don’t celebrate Thanksgiving” (A “we” that I only use up here, a “we” that means

“I am not
you”).

“What about K and J? I think they are staying in town.”

“Really, it’s fine,” I assure her, “It’s just a regular day for me.” (back to the singular pronoun).

II

For *us*, the unofficial start of the Holiday season is December 7: Día de las velitas.

We gather on sidewalks, streets, squares, or parks and light candles for wishes. The celebration is supposed to commemorate the Virgin Mary and her Immaculate Conception, but I, as a cultural catholic (aka a bad catholic), only care about the wishes (and, of course, the after-party).

III

The streets are especially lonely today. Everything remains still except the yellow leaves, slowly swaying back and forth in the breeze, the icy breeze that is punching me in the face right now.

It looks like all my neighbors went back home, all but the ones from the pink Victorian house: cars are parked in a row in their driveway. Nobody is on the porch, but the fireplace is lit. I move a bit closer to get some of the warmth. I see them, through the narrow windows, setting up a long dining room table. I suddenly feel hungry and tremendously sad. I wish I had not avoided B's invitation. (How stupid is longing for something I've never had?)

IV

I bike down Water Street all the way to the Town Clock Tower, where some people experiencing homelessness are getting in line to get free food. I recently learned that the term “people experiencing homelessness” is more politically correct than “homeless people”: it avoids defining someone solely by their housing situation. Another politically correct alternative is “unhoused people”: the fact they lack permanent roofs over their heads doesn’t mean they don't have communities or physical spaces they consider home. “The city is their home,” my very politically correct friend explained to me once (Is this city my home? Is it possible to have a roof and not a home? What makes a home, anyway?).

V

I remember that, before leaving to go to the after party, I would collect the melted wax from my family's candles and form a gigantic ball out of it (transforming our individual wishes into a single collective wish).

VI

“In a way,” says Sara Ahmed (2020), “we learn what home means, or how we occupy space at home and as home, when we leave home” (p.9).

VII

I turn right on Pacific. The downtown stores and the coffee shops are shut down. The dive bars are open. “To be oriented,” according to Ahmed, “is also to be turned towards certain objects, those that help us find our way” (p.1). Right now, I am turned towards a dive bar, and a Long Island Iced Tea will probably help me find my way, but it is not even noon (I can’t sink so low).

I think it’s kind of funny, but also kind of makes sense, that *they* up here start the season by giving thanks, and *we* down there start it by asking for something. Richard Rodriguez (1983) explains that *we*, the católicos, are primarily concerned with human beings as supplicants and with “God the Father...as One with the power to change our lives” (p.90). *We* turn to God in need. *We* pray “for favors and at desperate times” (p.90). Dios mío te pido, te ruego, que el Santa Cruz Diner esté abierto.

It’s closed. There is always Denny’s (I can sink so low).

VIII

Up here, I can always count on the comfort of other people dining alone.

“What can I get for you?”

“Hi...do you have a plant-based option for the Thanksgiving Special?”

She shakes her head impatiently.

“Uhhh...” I browse through the menu.

(I don’t get the “I-want-to-save-you” kind of smile from this white woman; I get more like bitch-I-don’t-have-all-day-hurry-the-fuck-up” kind of smile)

“Can I have the Thanksgiving Special without the turkey breast?”

“Sure...”

“And without the turkey gravy.”

“Ok...anything else I can get for you?”

“No, but can you please also remove the stuffing?”

“So, just mashed potatoes?”

“Yes, please.”

“You got it, honey.”

They threw some extra vegetables on my dish (I knew a white woman couldn’t resist the urge to save me). I look around. Only another person ordered the Thanksgiving Special: a white man in his fifties. I wonder if he is divorced and is thinking of his kids hiding green beans under their plates, or maybe he is remembering the creamy texture of his mother’s mashed potatoes. It wasn’t the mashed potatoes I was craving.

IX

Migration not only entails physical disorientation but also temporal disorientation. Time keeps moving forward, but somehow, I’ve moved backward. I’m starting again, like a child, pronouncing some words for the first time. Nothing up here is familiar, and these gummy mashed potatoes don’t remind me of anything.

X

But I cannot let myself fall into the easy trap of nostalgia. One does not have “to leave home for things to be disoriented or reoriented: homes too can be *giddy* places

where things are not always held in place” (p.9). I cannot let myself forget that for three years in a row, on en el Día de las velitas, I only made one wish: to leave.

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Different people

“Day twenty-seven.”

“The thirty-second day is drawing to a close.”

I remember 24 February. As for the rest, it’s all a blur. A siren. A hallway. The rule of two walls. One for the blast, the other for its fragments.

The elevator is out of service. Walking downstairs is a whole other story for my father. For my mother too. The last flight has no railings. I hadn’t noticed that. My father halts.

It thuds nearby, loud. No pauses. Leaving the building is frightening. Frightening, too, to stay there. We leave. Outside, the explosions are even stronger.

A house has lost its corner, living rooms exposed. A hanging chandelier, a wardrobe nearby. It’s stage design – of warfare.

A marketplace called Fairytale. It’s gone. Fairytale is no more. The Class supermarket, windows broken. I don’t take pictures, I just memorize. We are leaving Kharkiv, the memory of which imprints in this shape.

I wait for a release, to unclench inside. Here’s the beltway. We turn onto a road. First village. The same feeling as when I walked through the city: at any moment...

We’re on the border between regions. A fuel station. We stay there for a while. I step out. It’s spring here. In Kharkiv, it was winter. I have escaped.

There’s a queue at the regional executive committee.

“Cat?”

“Animal.”

“Putin?”

“War.”