

Lin-Manuel Miranda

“WHAT’D YOU GET?”

“What’d *you* get?”

It is January 5, 1988, school is back in session, and we, the second graders of Hunter College Elementary School, are comparing our holiday haul in the mini gym. The Hanukkah/Christmas split within our grade is pretty close to sixty/forty—whether we got small gifts for eight days or a lot of gifts on the twenty-fifth, the requests are the same. He-Man/She-Ra action figures. Voltron. ThunderCats. Transformers. Raphie Posner got the G.I. Joe aircraft carrier, which is almost eight feet long, so several of us make a mental note to book a playdate with Raphie ASAP. We speak in hushed, excited whispers, envious sighs, a postconsumerist reverie.

I look across the mini gym and catch eyes with Jillian, with Pachó, with Jason, and with Jiman.

We share a smile. The holidays may be done for all the other kids but not for us.

For the five Latino kids in the second grade at Hunter College Elementary School, the holiday haul is not over. For Jillian, Pachó, Jason, Jiman, and I will gather hay for the camels that are on their way to our respective houses and apartments that night. There is no hay in Manhattan, so we will likely dig under piles of snow in Central or Riverside or Inwood Hill Parks for just enough dead grass to fill a shoebox. We will set these humble offerings, our shoeboxes full of dead New York grass and dirt, by our beds, too excited to sleep. We will meditate on the Three Kings, those same ones who came to Baby Jesús, pronounced with the accent, and we will hope that those same Three Kings will bring us anything that Santa may have forgotten the week before.

January 6. Three Kings' Day. A school day.

We wake up and are dazzled by presents, right at the foot of our bed. There is no waiting for parents to wake up on Three Kings' Day, no homilies about the giving being the best part—Kings are only interested in gifting children, and we are here for it. There, at the foot of our beds, that missing He-Man doll, that rare Pound Puppy, that fancy lunch box—that hard-to-find toy that is perhaps more affordable in whatever postholiday sales the Three Kings frequent.

Then we look around the house and our minds are blown.

The grass, for the camels—it's *everywhere*. These camels are sloppy eaters, and for a moment our minds blaze with the mental image of *real* camels, climbing our stairs, somehow clopping in from our fire escapes, navigating Washington Heights apartments, leaving behind toys and a mess of dead, half-devoured grass. We look around and wonder, did we hear them in the night? Do we remember hearing a bump or a snort? Could it be?

We barely have time to play with our new toys. We scarf down Cheerios and *café*, heavy on the milk, and race to school, where Pacho, Jason, Jillian, Jiman, and I, for one day a year, are the chosen ones, our new toys in hand. We are the only Latino kids in our grade, and on most days we are friendly but not close, each in our respective corners, unsure of how to share a world and a culture we ordinarily keep at home. But on January 6, we are basically on par with Jesús, because the Three Kings picked the five of us, and all the other Latino kids in the world, and bestowed us with gifts, just like him.

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