

"You know, mija,
it isn't where you're born that matters,
it's where you choose to die—that's your country."

I LIFT MY LAMP BESIDE THE GOLDEN DOOR!

To love a country as if you've lost one:
1968

my mother leaves **Cuba**
for
America,

to **LOVE** a

one foot inside a plane destined for a country
she knew only as a name,
her other foot anchored to the platform of her **patria**, her hand clutched
around one suitcase, taking only what she needs most:

C O U N T R Y
a color
on
a
map,
or
glossy
photos
from
store
magazines,
hand-colored photographs of her family
her wedding veil
the doorknob of her house
a jar of dirt from her backyard
goodbye letters she won't open
for
years

To love a country as if you've lost one:
I hear her—

once upon a time

reading picture books
over my shoulder at bedtime,
both of us learning
Eng-lish, sound-ing out words as strange as the talk-ing
an-i-mals and fair-haired prin-ces-ses in their pa-ges.

as if

LOST

you've

I taste her first attempts at ma-ca-ro-ni-n-cheese
(but with **chorizo** and peppers),

and her shame
over
Thanks-gi-ving tur-keys
always dry,
but countered by her perfect pork **pernil** and garlic **yuca**.

To love a country as if you've lost one:
as if it were you on a plane departing from America
forever,

the last scene in which you're a madman scribbling
the names of your favorite flowers,
trees,
and birds
you'd never see again,
your
address and
phone number
you'd never use again,
the color of your father's eyes,
your mother's hair,
terrified you could forget these

one

from "Mother Country"
by Richard Blanco