

I lift my lamp beside the golden door.

To love a country as if you've lost one:
1988

my mother leaves Cuba
for
America,

to LOVE a

one foot
inside a plane destined for a country
she knew only as a name,

a color
on
a
map,

her other foot
anchored to the platform of her patria, her hand clutched
around one suitcase, taking only what she needs most:

hand-colored photographs of her family
her wedding veil
the doorknob of her house
a jar of dirt from her backyard
faded letters
She won't open

C O U N T R Y

or
glossy
photos
from
stone
magazines,
and

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

once, for a time,

reading picture books
over my shoulder at bedtime,

both of us learning
English, sound-ing out words as strange as the talk-ing
an-i-mals and fair-haired prin-ces-ses in their pa-ges.

fears

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 perrill 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

You know, Miss,
it isn't where you've been that matters,
it's where you choose to die—
that's your country.

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

my mother leaves *Cuba*
for
America,

TO LOVE A

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inside a plane destined for a country
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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
drug
magazines,

handwritten photographs of her family
her mother and
the daughter of her house
a jar of her home her handkerchief
perhaps letters
she must open for home

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*.

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terrified you could forget these.

ONE

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

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1968

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