

Richard Blanco
from Cuba to New York City in 1968
Source: Mother Country by Richard Blanco
Designed by Hannah Cai

“I lift my lamp beside the golden door”

I wonder if my parents consider America as their home;
if they love this country. Or if they only moved here for better
opportunities for themselves, and for me and my little brother.

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,

C O U N T R Y

a color
on
a
map,
or
glossy
photos
from
store
drug
magazines,

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 doorway 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 English, sounding out words
as strange as the talking animals and fair-haired
princesses in their pages.

as if you've LOST one

I taste her first attempts at macaroni-n-cheese
(but with chorizo and peppers), and her shame over
Thanksgiving turkeys 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

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

Richard Blanco is the first immigrant, the first Latino, the first openly
gay person and the youngest person to be the U.S. inaugural poet.