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tengo una pena en el alma

each word bitten down
until the sweet tastes like fibrous grit
and chokes on the way down
but maybe you'll forget
each scream between sex and death
between joy and a growl
maybe you'll forget the sound
baptized herself with names
la yiyiyi
you'll forget the sound of her voice

ay mi yi yis

motown funk and august in harlem, detroit, philly
the steps and porches sag under feet, pat, pat
oye mami, I can't understand what you're sayin'
but I sure do like the beat
boogaloo

doo-wop molasses over goat-skin taut with moans
molondrones called okra
grits called maicena
the peanut vendor empieza su pregón y ya se va

cuando más pude quererte sin deternete te dije adios

she was an addict to the music and the drugs
mascara round her eyes like freshly laid tar
voice went down our throats like miel de abeja
with a sting

a self-proclaimed bad girl
the weighted chemistry unglued her wigs
she threw them at the cameras with her shoes
explosive dribble off her lips

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producers called it salsa
careful cover over campo grass,
blood-stained sugarcane and slavery in the islands
the liner notes don't list the band

we cannot trace the history of the trombones
the hands that made the long yells
that we heard when tias put their hands on hips
and demanded "y dónde estabas tú?"

oye papi, y cómo te llamas tú en el tumbao

we string together names of the dead
and pass our tongues over
hector, la lupe
one name for those dead in vietnam
on the streets, in apartments with no heat
from unknowns like winter,
or the hard cages where they put colorful creatures

porque yo tengo una pena en el alma

