

variations on a theme by Louis Armstrong

My whole life has been happiness. Through all the misfortunes, etc. I did not plan anything. Life was there for me, and I accepted it. And life, whatever came out, has been beautiful to me and I love everybody. —L. A.

in the frogs that jump at night
and make the grass breathe,
in a knife slicing potatoes,
broccoli, zucchini, and chicken breasts
to the ritmo juguetón of a tango
in the kitchen, a concerto in the cab
of an old Toyota on our way
to work, a bossa in a Denny's booth
at midnight, in trombones that tumble
from the record player before sleep,
in notes that seep through wet shoulders
and long, black hair, in the blue light
that trickles down gray windowpanes
as John Coltrane heaves his tenor
through the afternoon, in the man who said
he thought I was white, in the Blink-
182 tattoo I got on my left arm
because I thought I was—until I thought
that to talk about skin
in terms of color is to use
a metaphor and if we are
going to use metaphors then I can think
of a better one—in my skin flaking
like buñuelos at a posada, clinging
like grass, splintering, grinding, igniting, in one
hundred pesos a day, in my hands
turning green from mowing
all the fucking grass in the world, in your hand
curled around the neck of an old Telecaster
teaching me how to make my way
through a blues, in a dominant chord, in a diminished
fifth, in a blue note, in your fingers
around my cock as I tell you that I've never
done it and you tell me that you are
not going to do anything weird and I feel it
going inside you, in the kiss
and smile you give me afterwards, in my tongue
making slurping sounds, in the sizzling
grease of McNuggets and beef
patties, in the dog lady who drives up →

every night and orders thirty plain hamburgers
for her dogs but without salt because her dogs
don't like salt and who called me an asshole
one time because I gave her twenty
nine, in the pink dildo that you gave me
for my twenty-ninth birthday and you laughed
your ass off and I said I'm going to DP you
with it and we'll see if you laugh then, in steamed rice
for lunch but no soy sauce at the office, in just enough
money for two crunchy tacos and a Coke
to share, in the chocolate I licked off
your thighs and your nipples, in ice cream, el carrito
del Matute y sus nieves de garrafa a la hora
del recreo, in children selling Chiclets at a stop
light, los limpiabotas, men selling foam lizards
on a string of wire, en el camión del gas
y el de los garrafones de agua, en los empedrados
del cerro del cuatro, streets paved with starving
children and mothers lining up to get little
packets of Vida Suero electrolytes because twenty-six
thousand children died of diarrhea last
year, in the woman pursing her lips
outside a Pizza Hut asking for one
dollar, in the smile she gives
me when I give her a five and how it makes
my pan pizza with extra olives
taste like nothing, in trying to find
a mariachi en la Glorieta Minerva
on a Friday night, in el guitarrón
y el acordeón playing, like, dale cabrón, dale, sóplale
a esa pinche trompeta y de ahí nos vamos
por un unos sopos y un atolito y al rato
unas chelas, in a woman playing cello
by the steps of el Teatro Degollado, in street vendors
selling churros, tacos de lengua, al pastor,
on plastic tables or standing up, in the porous
stone walls of the colonial buildings that house
the University of Guadalajara's music
conservatory with its one beat up upright
piano to split between eight sets of eager
young fingers, in cut up mangoes, cucumbers,
jicamas in plastic cups con limón y chile, in a man
with skin of wood pounding the bones
of a marimba and dreaming of tortillas

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y arroz, en 2X1 Tuesdays at the tacos
y el Saúl tragándose veintiún tacos
de asada and if he could see me now
tomando clases del pinche Shakespeare y la chingada,
in finding myself thinking
more and more in English and forgetting
words in Spanish, needle, toothbrush,
umbrella, in the old woman who sits
at Starbucks to read with her poodle
in a baby's stroller next to her, in the tasteless
chicken my mother cooked for us
during her lunch break before going back
to work, in every single fucking hour
of every single fucking day my mother
worked for a few pesos because she was all
we had, in the striped mandolin she bought
me because she thought I had
a musical ear, in wood, in strings, in hair, in guts, in teeth, nails, coffee, conchas,
handjobs, sixty nines, bus stops, pot holes, soccer balls, lipsticks, huaraches, rain,
screams, moans, tears, lips, VHS tapes, fights, popcorn, anal sex, veins bulging
against the skin, soda cans, Hershey's bars, birria, pozole, nubes, granizo, canicas,
laughter, mud, bolis, paletas, sweat, wet dirt smell of a day

and all the fucking
grass in the world
I love you

in the backseat of your dad's
Chrysler where we fucked all night parked in the back
of a McDonald's and then watched the sun come
up, in a good night kiss, in a dirty thong hanging
from the fence by the trash cans

in the air that passes between us, opening
our lungs, mine for a second, then yours.