



Dance to the Horns + 2

By

Chris Goldsmith

WHY I LIKE IT: Poetry Editor HEZEKIAH writes...

Chris Goldsmith has a distinctly unique style. As you read, bear in mind that 'Crudo' is Spanish for 'raw' and slang for 'hangover.' I did not know this. Imbibe the flow of his prose. "The sun was a lemon rind."..." Tell me the ways to avoid one's destiny. Your will facing your fate." In 'Dance to The Horns.' "Just keep / your dignity and practice laughing without a reason."

"The horn is how everyone knows / the journey sounds better than the destination." In the end, 'No Solution' "you are you am / soy aqui / who you say you are / soy mas / who you act / you be / eres muy" Sounds better in Spanish, ...stay sweet. (Spacing is poet's own.)

Crudo

The beginning

Once a long time ago my grandfather asked, "Estas crudo?"
He knew I was crudo. The smile on his face
made it clear I didn't have to answer. But then
as he stood to walk into the yard (my tia clearing up his space
at la mesa) he asked, "Por que estas crudo?"
This was rhetorical, he spoke it without waiting
for any response that might salvage his disappointment,
the screen door shutting behind him.

Tell me the ways to avoid one's destiny.

The Reasons

1. Simple. The tequila and orange juice tio Ricardo enticed the room with made me feel smarter and better looking. (What are the battle scenes for internal conflicts?)
2. Somewhere last night I realized the social order I believed in was all a complete fallacy and I had no clue how to strip away the lie. (Invent new words, that will help.)
3. Last night, Pepino Cuevas won the fight. And you, grandfather said, "He hits como un burro." Of course, you went to bed, but we found his victory a great reason to celebrate.
4. I was staying in Douglas on a Saturday night. Which is just a big hairy regret.
5. Tio Ricardo started singing old Creedence Clear Water songs. "Tambourines and elephants are playing in the band
Won't you take a ride on a flyin' spoon?..."

Later that afternoon

Tio Ricardo took my grandfather for a drive in his dark green '58 Jaguar. What doesn't fit in Douglas Arizona in 1982? The sun was a lemon rind.

Mi abuelo returned all smiles saying that car sure runs good. Que suave. It didn't feel like we were going that fast. But grandmother said no to a drive because if she couldn't get behind the wheel, she saw no reason to go for a ride. My grandmother was too bad ass for riding shotgun, ever. If you leave Douglas you must be careful you don't fall off the edge.

Otro Mas

Tio Ricardo pulled out another bottle of tequila and a can of orange juice concentrate. He mixed up the orange juice with water as the day cooled. The street was empty and was going to stay that way. My grandfather walked out onto the porch with his harmonica. His silence was his disapproval. His faith a refuge when nothing surprises anymore.

Dance to The Horns

You open a jar of salsa picante because the chips are in a bowl and the people will begin arriving soon. The cats know something will be going down. They are anxious and start climbing on the table. If given a chance they will lick the butter stick until it looks like a twig. The house is quiet now like a shoe box full of small wires. Just keep your dignity and practice laughing without a reason.

You made the choice of selecting the medium hot salsa. Some of your friends are older and think catchup can be too spicy. Onions and garlic are like rings of flavor hell. A few will arrive with flowers and cartons of milk. A few will crumb up the place.

Never do what common people do. Scoop out the blues with a frijole-stained apron, dance to the horns and make sure everyone washes their hands after they sprinkle the chiltipins they crushed up and sprinkled into the caldo. Burning one's eyes is a common story.

The music must have horns. They announce the recognition of the struggle. The purpose of courage and endurance. The horn players are always the ones who use their handkerchiefs the most to wipe away their work. The horns embrace their efforts. They pause take a deep breathe, smile and get ready for the next push up the hill that may never be crested. The horn is how everyone knows the journey sounds better than the destination.

No Solution

Someone brought the no
and produced grief backpacks
moon drops and drips
onto a sea bathing small mercy

a hole where the money goes
despair rescued
the panic rush
into aisles of selections
chaos sliced lime sin playas

this is sucksess
next to trees
full of hissing leaves
dismissing the three
on a match rule

you are you am
soy aqui
who you say you are
soy mas
who you act
you be
eres muy

this is no solution
living with a nostalgia
that imitates a stream
that does not flow

cows in the dust

milk the world

slipped out
a classic silent French exit.

THE POET SPEAKS: *A long time ago (1983) in an undergraduate poetry writing class at the University of Arizona, the poet/professor Jon Anderson said something near this; poetry expands the boundaries of language. It takes the ambiguous and gives it form, intention, maybe even meaning. And poetry also takes those notions we hold dear and makes them ambiguous, redefines, even challenges them. That day, I was ready to hear those ideas. In my mind poetry needs to surprise. And few events in our world surprise us. Why else push the blankets off in the morning and fix a cup of Joe? That is what poetry does for me, and when I write my goal is to be surprised. The poems Fleas On The Dog selected are also highlighted by code switching. Reading Martin Espada gave me permission to try using my bilingual upbringing into my work. To be clear, I don't know how effective of a high school English teacher I would have been (28 years at the same school) without poetry. So many days it rescued me and the students (who were great) from the predictable.*

AUTHOR BIO: Christopher Rubio-Goldsmith was born in Merida, Yucatan, grew up in Tucson, Arizona and taught English at Tucson High School for 27 years. Much of his work explores growing up near the border, being raised biracial/bilingual and teaching in a large urban school where 70% of the students are American/Mexican. A Pushcart nominee, his writings will appear in Drunk Monkeys, Barbar Literary Journal and have been published in Sky Island Journal, Muse, Discretionary Love and other places too. His wife, Kelly, sometimes edits his work, and the two cats seem happy.