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Digging for Lost Temples

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David Estringel holds a Bachelor's degree in English. His poetry and short fiction have appeared and/or are forthcoming in online and print publications, such as the *Setu Bilingual Journal*, *Azabares Literary Magazine*, *Route 7 Review*, the *Blue Nib*, *Pif Magazine*, *Cutthroat: A Journal of the Arts*, *Latin Anthology*, *Rigorous Magazine*, *Bosphorus Review*, *Labar Magazine*, the *Bitchin' Kitch*, and *Drunk Monkeys*. David has also been a lead editor at The Good Men Project and editor at *Red Fez* and the *Elixir Magazine*.

Digging for Lost Temples

Thumbing through *The Borderlands*, I can't help but feel not brown enough. I'm Mexican Lite. Got a case of the "coconuts." There are no rageful battle cries inflaming this breast. No bitterness lingering on the tip of the tongue (the back of hands and the starch of white collars taste just the same no matter the bearer's color). No tortured soul, longing for identity and re-appropriation. There's just me and this suit of rosy-beige meat that touts my value best in the dead of winter.

"If you're not pissed, you aren't paying attention," some people used to say. Others, "We're nothing but second-class citizens—wetbacks—to them!" (My back dried three generations ago) Then, there is all this talk of The Wall, as if one had actually never existed before in the first place. How funny people are when the invisible begin to reflect the Spectrum of Things in the cruel clarity of daylight—ancient atrocities shining, unforgivingly, like newly minted coins under brusque fluorescents. When did symbols become more real than the things they represented? (Maybe around the same time 'detention centers' and 'concentration camps' meant different things?) "Better them than me," I would think to myself. "Everyone's got to hate someone, right?"

Call it apathy. Detachment. Indifference. Call it what you like, but don't let an absence of tears convey a treason of the flesh. I know where I come from and where my people have been. I am one of the many brown bodies that was piled in heaps, used as target practice by Texas Rangers that stood proudly before them, posing for photographs. I swung low from sturdy boughs in the Southwest, proving *Strange Fruit* —plucked in all its hues and flavors—tastes coppery and bitter in Life's maw. I starved outside with the rest of the dogs, staring into diner windows—mind, body, and spirit consumed—barred from entry, wanting for crumbs. The narrative's my own, but the story remains the same.

I'm no one's *machisto*, gangbanger, Latin lover, wetback, or Spic. I am no one's pimp, *Sancho*, *caballero*, or *maricon*. I can't roll my Rs, I hate tequila, and I don't code switch. Sheepskins—paid by my own coin—adorn my walls, not holographic portraits of *The Last Supper* or *La Santa Muerte* adorned with plastic red roses from the dollar store. I am not "spicy" like something that is novelly consumed. And

I—a being, self-determined, not cast from a vulgar mold— respect God’s will as much as he respects mine (which doesn’t say much).

The blood of peasants and slaves, warriors and kings run through our veins. Our ears once heard gods’ whispers through the rustling of leaves in the breeze and the trickling of streams over time-smoothed stones. We rode the winds--the sun kissing our backs (not breaking them)—as we flew through fields of pale azure upon Serpent’s wings, over treetops and verdant expanses. We ate our enemies’ courage and drank victor’s wine with lips, stained red, from their skulls. (So, step back with your ‘tallboys’ and that Four Lokos jive!) This is what lies beneath the skin. Melanin be damned! We are the sons and daughters of Earth and Sky, Aztec Temples of Sun and Moon, buried beneath blanched soil, crowned by cathedrals—papal tiaras anointed by brown blood that pepper the land like so many gravestones. Remember?

Remember!

So, I pray to the Archangel Anzaldúa to help me find my lost sovereignty—my words wafting up into the clouds on velvety ropes smoke of sandalwood incense and braided sweetgrass. Tears of honey fall from Heaven upon my skin, feeding cuts and scrapes no one (not even I) can see. Unfolding her rainbow-hued wings, like Hebe on Olympus, she descends with arms outstretched and an angelic smile. Face to face, she pulls me close, blesses my forehead with champurrado-scented kisses then tugs at my ear and says with the fire of cinnamon on her tongue, “*Huervo*, just love the skin you’re in!”