

PELUDA



POEMS BY
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Origin Regimen

before there were legs, bikini lines, eyebrows, upper lips,
underarms, forearms, labias, assholes, chins,
or the waxing table there were houses
& two immigrants who cleaned them. there were sinks
inside of those houses. carpeted staircases, tile floors,
windows with curtains like your eyelashes, closets
your mother's whole family could live in
if she brought them here with her but instead
she left—*joo need to heat up de wax to
250 degrees*—your sister played with cats
at the top of the stairs. she scratched
behind their ears & pulled on their tails
& they yowled. she gave them names
they never asked for & once a cat opened
up her little claws & scratched her back. the cat hid
under the dining table to escape the wrath
of your mother, who put neosporin
on the scratch—*with a leetle bit of cotton*
joo have to test it with the wooden paleta
because if joo are no careful jor skin could
look like a e-snake—your father whistled
while scrubbing the toilets
he danced into rooms
that would never be his own,
wiggling his hips to a song
that was not there.
his hairy dark arms
wrapped around your mother's waist
like vacuum tubes. later, she would point
to clay pots with old flowers in them, or coffee
with not enough milk to show what kind of color

he was when she loved him. before the beauty
 business there was a hot homeland
 with gossiping aunts, there were mountains
 there were things we enjoyed more because we didn't
 have enough—*noise, basta, joo are old*
enough joo can do dis by jorself now, every week
joo should do dis, joo don't need
my help—you were there the whole time,
 in your mother's belly, weighing her back down
 with the heaviness of your life, inhaling fumes
 from the windex & the bleach, you have no name
 but you have nails & hair
 like your father's, thick & dark
 from an origin with ships,
 origin he never really traced.
 you will come out late, you will—*wait wait wait,*
'spera! leddit dry!—& if you start waxing early enough
 the hair will grow back thinner & if you're in america
 long enough you can get rid of your accent
 you can—*pool it out faster, like-a faster,*
like-a harder en de opposite direction, joo don't wanna
reep de e-skin off esa cuca, ha-ha!—
 the best part about waxing is after
 when you are looking at the strip of wax
 at all of the hair sticking up like bodies
 or fossils or misshapen street signs
 all pointing to
der we go, see?
finally!
oof.

we can see jor face now

Maybe She's Born With It, Maybe She Got Up Early

i don't know who or what the "good immigrant"
 is, but i think my mother could never get away
 from being the cleaning lady. maybe
 she has always been a knot in the neck
 of a trash bag. so, instead of a white lady
 house it was a white lady body. instead of dirt
 from curtains, it was soil beneath nails.
 instead of clean countertops, it was faces
 without blackheads. the girls in the bathrooms
 say that their mothers never taught them
 about "beauty stuff." & *anyway, beauty is*
ephemeral. i don't know what ephemeral
 means, but i know i bought sandwiches
 for lunch with my mother's tips, i know
 when the economy crashed, beauty was
 the first thing my mother's clients crossed
 off their weekly budget so they let their nails
 grow jagged, let their bikini lines become
 bikini borders & i know that the first time
 i got my heart broken, mami took me
 into the kitchen & waxed my eyebrows
 told me that the best revenge was looking
 your best, reminded me that beauty is a lot
 of things, but mostly it is pain. so Ow!
 will win the pageant, melucha
 Ay-Carajo-Shit! has a medal around her neck,
 mi linda, Cómo Me Duele drives a shiny car
 with the top down to the prettiest place
 in the world, mi peluda.

you are meticulous because everyone is watching.
you are afraid because it is the only way
you know how to love.

you, not riot grrrl, but rolling all of your R's.
less betty paige, more betty la fea.
less zoey deschanel, more chilindrina.
not trying to be more white—just more loved.
just trying to find a song that is about the girl
who is always fixing, snipping away

at the bits of herself that are always becoming

Lip / Stain / Must / Ache

my ugly mustache distracts from the red lip
stain
i bought it because of that story
in *This Is How You Lose* Her where Junot Díaz or his
Alter Ego or

maybe they are the same
(do you have an alter ego, mami? does her name sound like
the coming together of bracelets

when you run up the stairs? does she like to go out
dancing?
does she kiss a lot of married men? have you
ever let her skirt fly up in the breeze? did she dangle

her head from a high window just to watch
what it would do to her hair?)
he says red lipstick was made para las latinas
i am latina or i just like being watched by men
or i just like leaving
marks on their shirts
it doesn't matter if i can't remember the passage
correctly because i remember the way it made me
feel

which is seen which is defined which is loved
i heat up the wax i extract the problem
with tweezers from the place

i remember the most

AKA What Would Jessica Jones Do?

jessica jones is so dark-haired she must be latina
i pretend she is so that i am
not once again rooting for some angry white girl

so i tell myself that
all of this throwing a heater out of the window
must be chingona
all of this rude lonely girl must be bruja
all of this breaking & entering & *you shoot at me,*
i'll pull the bullet out of my ruined jacket &
shove it up your ass with my pinky finger
must be mujerista

all of this dark hair clinging to her rosy cheeks
like a bad boyfriend
must have been my abuela's once
all of this smash a cockroach that crawls up the drain
must be with my mother's fist

& when jessica jones
looks in the mirror
& says "to be alone is better"

it must be me
it must be me
not smiling back

You Know How to Say Arroz con Pollo but Not What You Are

if you ask me if i am fluent in Spanish i will tell you my Spanish is
an itchy phantom / limb—reaching for words & only finding
air / my Spanish is my third birthday party: half of it is memory,
the other half is that photograph on the fridge / is what my family
has told me / if you ask me if i am fluent i will tell you that my
Spanish is a puzzle / left in the rain / too soggy to make its parts fit
together / so that it can look just like the picture on the box / i will
tell you that my Spanish is possessive / adjectives / it is
proper / nouns dressed in pearls and bracelets / it is are you / up
yet. it is there is a lot to do today / my Spanish is on my resume / as
a skill. / my Spanish is on his favorite shirt in red mouth marks / on
my toothbrush in red mouth marks / if you ask me I will tell
you / my Spanish is hungrier than it was before / my Spanish
reaches for words / at the top of a shelf with no stepping stool / is
hit in the head with all of the old words that have been hiding up
there / my Spanish wonders how bad it is to eat / something that's
expired / my Spanish wonders if it has an expiration date / my
Spanish asks you why it is always being compared / to food / spicy,
hot, sizzle / my Spanish tells you it is not something / to be eaten
and shit out / but does not really believe it / if you ask me if i am
fluent in Spanish i will tell you that / my Spanish chews / on a
pencil in the corner of a classroom / does not raise its hand / my
Spanish is my older sister's sore / smile at her only beauty
pageant / my Spanish is made-up story about a parent / who never
came home / my Spanish is made-up story about a parent who
never came home & traveled to beautiful countries / sent me
postcards from all of them / my Spanish is me, tracing every letter
they were able to fit in / my Spanish is true / story of my parents'
divorce / chaotic, broken / something i have to choose / to
remember correctly / my Spanish is wondering when my parents

will be American / asks me if I'm white / yet / if you ask me if i am
fluent in Spanish i will try to tell you the story / of how my parents
met in an ESL class / how it was / when they trained their mouths
to say / i love you / in a different language / i hate you / with their
mouths shut / I will tell you how my father's accent makes him
sound like Zorro / how my mother tried to tie her tongue / to a post
with an English language leash / i will tell you that the tongue
always ran / stubbornly back to the language it had always been in
love with / even when she tried to tame it / it always turned
loose / if you ask me if i am fluent / i will tell you my Spanish is
understanding that there are stories / that will always be out of
my reach / there are people / who will never fit together the way
that i wanted them to / there are letters / that will always stay /
silent / there are some words that will always escape / me.

My Hair Stays on Your Pillow Like a Question Mark

skinny white girl with a sugar skull tattoo says:

no offense melissa??

but i know when you've been around??

because your hair gets all over everything??

& no offense but it kind of grosses me out??

if you come into my apartment

can you just please be aware of that??

imagine being as gross as u fear??

imagine the things that shed

from you turning into something

that survives the apocalypse??

the scientists trapping it in a plastic container??

putting a bunch of nuclear science waves on it??

it surviving but coming out with two more heads??

or i don't know, is that how it works??

imagine your hairs as daddy longlegs crawling

up the shower curtain??

daddy's long legs??

daddy's dark legs??

daddy's hairy dark legs??

imagine you are what makes the white girls in a brooklyn
apartment scream??

except deep down??you want to be a white girl
in a brooklyn apartment??

screaming??

following her dreams??

there is not a white part inside of you
or maybe there is??

if so what do you do with it??
do you spray it with windex??

trap it under a paper cup??

find the right shoe??

find the right man??

& then what does he do???

with the body??

What If My Last Name Got a Bikini Wax, Too

it's really long, after all
you can see it sticking out
of the line you gave me
to write it on

you're supposed to show your work
or make it look effortless.

my last name can easily stretch
out on the beach with you

with her legs spread & her soft parts out
she will get brown

enough to be asked where she is
from & this is how she will know
she is different.

she won't get stuck

in your teeth like some songs

this way when i take you

upstairs in the middle of the night

& i hyphenate my body with yours

when you say my clean name into my ear

i won't have to turn off the lights