

# PEDRO S E L E C T E D P O E T R Y PIETRI

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# **PUERTO RICAN OBITUARY**

## PUERTO RICAN OBITUARY

They worked  
They were always on time  
They were never late  
They never spoke back  
when they were insulted  
They worked  
They never took days off  
that were not on the calendar  
They never went on strike  
without permission  
They worked  
ten days a week  
and were only paid for five  
They worked  
They worked  
They worked  
and they died  
They died broke  
They died owing  
They died never knowing  
what the front entrance  
of the first national city bank looks like

Juan  
Miguel  
Milagros  
Olga  
Manuel  
All died yesterday today  
and will die again tomorrow  
passing their bill collectors

on to the next of kin  
All died  
waiting for the garden of eden  
to open up again  
under a new management  
All died  
dreaming about america  
waking them up in the middle of the night  
screaming: Mira Mira  
your name is on the winning lottery ticket  
for one hundred thousand dollars  
All died  
hating the grocery stores  
that sold them make-believe steak  
and bullet-proof rice and beans  
All died waiting dreaming and hating

Dead Puerto Ricans  
Who never knew they were Puerto Ricans  
Who never took a coffee break  
from the ten commandments  
to KILL KILL KILL  
the landlords of their cracked skulls  
and communicate with their latino souls

Juan  
Miguel  
Milagros  
Olga  
Manuel  
From the nervous breakdown streets  
where the mice live like millionaires  
and the people do not live at all  
are dead and were never alive

Juan

died waiting for his number to hit

Miguel

died waiting for the welfare check

to come and go and come again

Milagros

died waiting for her ten children

to grow up and work

so she could quit working

Olga

died waiting for a five dollar raise

Manuel

died waiting for his supervisor to drop dead

so he could get a promotion

Is a long ride

from Spanish Harlem

to long island cemetery

where they were buried

First the train

and then the bus

and the cold cuts for lunch

and the flowers

that will be stolen

when visiting hours are over

Is very expensive

Is very expensive

But they understand

Their parents understood

Is a long non-profit ride

from Spanish Harlem

to long island cemetery

Juan  
Miguel  
Milagros  
Olga  
Manuel  
All died yesterday today  
and will die again tomorrow  
Dreaming  
Dreaming about queens  
Clean-cut lily-white neighborhood  
Puerto Ricanless scene  
Thirty-thousand-dollar home  
The first spics on the block  
Proud to belong to a community  
of gringos who want them lynched  
Proud to be a long distance away  
from the sacred phrase: Que Pasa

These dreams  
These empty dreams  
from the make-believe bedrooms  
their parents left them  
are the after-effects  
of television programs  
about the ideal  
white american family  
with black maids  
and latino janitors  
who are well train—  
to make everyone  
and their bill collectors  
laugh at them  
and the people they represent

Juan

died dreaming about a new car

Miguel

died dreaming about new anti-poverty programs

Milagros

died dreaming about a trip to Puerto Rico

Olga

died dreaming about real jewelry

Manuel

died dreaming about the irish sweepstakes

They all died

like a hero sandwich dies

in the garment district

at twelve o'clock in the afternoon

social security number to ashes

union dues to dust

They knew

they were born to weep

and keep the morticians employed

as long as they pledge allegiance

to the flag that wants them destroyed

They saw their names listed

in the telephone directory of destruction

They were train to turn

the other cheek by newspapers

that misspelled mispronounced

and misunderstood their names

and celebrated when death came

and stole their final laundry ticket

They were born dead  
and they died dead  
Is time  
to visit sister lopez again  
the number one healer  
and fortune card dealer  
in Spanish Harlem  
She can communicate  
with your late relatives  
for a reasonable fee  
Good news is guaranteed  
Rise Table Rise Table  
death is not dumb and disable—  
Those who love you want to know  
the correct number to play  
Let them know this right away  
Rise Table Rise Table  
death is not dumb and disable  
Now that your problems are over  
and the world is off your shoulders  
help those who you left behind  
find financial peace of mind  
Rise Table Rise Table  
death is not dumb and disable  
If the right number we hit  
all our problems will split  
and we will visit your grave  
on every legal holiday  
Those who love you want to know  
the correct number to play  
Let them know this right away  
We know your spirit is able  
Death is not dumb and disable  
RISE TABLE RISE TABLE



Juan

Miguel

Milagros

Olga

Manuel

All died yesterday today

and will die again tomorrow

Hating fighting and stealing

broken windows from each other

Practicing a religion without a roof

The old testament

The new testament

according to the gospel

of the internal revenue

the judge and jury and executioner

protector and eternal bill collector

Secondhand shit for sale

Learn how to say Como Esta Usted

and you will make a fortune

They are dead

They are dead

and will not return from the dead

until they stop neglecting

the art of their dialogue—

for broken english lessons

to impress the mister goldsteins—

who keep them employed

as lavaplatos porters messenger boys

factory workers maids stock clerks

shipping clerks assistant mailroom

assistant, assistant assistant

to the assistant's assistant

assistant lavaplatos and automatic

artificial smiling doormen  
for the lowest wages of the ages  
and rages when you demand a raise  
because *is* against the company policy  
to promote SPICS SPICS SPICS

Juan  
died hating Miguel because Miguel's  
used car was in better running condition  
than his used car

Miguel  
died hating Milagros because Milagros  
had a color television set  
and he could not afford one yet

Milagros  
died hating Olga because Olga  
made five dollars more on the same job

Olga  
died hating Manuel because Manuel  
had hit the numbers more times  
than she had hit the numbers

Manuel  
died hating all of them

Juan  
Miguel  
Milagros  
and Olga  
because they all spoke broken english  
more fluently than he did

And now they are together  
in the main lobby of the void  
Addicted to silence  
Off limits to the wind

Confined to worm supremacy  
in long island cemetery  
This is the groovy hereafter  
the protestant collection box  
was talking so loud and proud about

Here lies Juan  
Here lies Miguel  
Here lies Milagros  
Here lies Olga  
Here lies Manuel  
who died yesterday today  
and will die again tomorrow  
Always broke  
Always owing  
Never knowing  
that they are beautiful people  
Never knowing  
the geography of their complexion

PUERTO RICO IS A BEAUTIFUL PLACE  
PUERTORRIQUENOS ARE A BEAUTIFUL RACE

If only they  
had turned off the television  
and tune into their own imaginations  
If only they  
had used the white supremacy bibles  
for toilet paper purpose  
and make their latino souls  
the only religion of their race  
If only they  
had return to the definition of the sun  
after the first mental snowstorm

on the summer of their senses  
If only they  
had kept their eyes open  
at the funeral of their fellow employees  
who came to this country to make a fortune  
and were buried without underwears

Juan

Miguel

Milagros

Olga

Manuel

will right now be doing their own thing  
where beautiful people sing  
and dance and work together  
where the wind is a stranger  
to miserable weather conditions  
where you do not need a dictionary  
to communicate with your people

Aqui

Se Habla Espanol

all the time

Aqui you salute your flag first  
Aqui there are no dial soap commercials  
Aqui everybody smells good  
Aqui tv dinners do not have a future  
Aqui the men and women admire desire  
and never get tired of each other  
Aqui Que Pasa Power is what's happening  
Aqui to be called negrito  
means to be called LOVE