

Our House is Your House: Four From Mexico

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Woman Bidding a Soldier Goodbye
The Tests
Thriller

Our House is Your House

If you haven't dined here, you will again. Because of Angelina who greets you at the door—
Come in from the rain. Because our house is your house. So sit down by the window with the family of twelve, at the spacious table in the center of the room. And take off your coat. The food will take a while. Because like at your mother's, there's only one cook. And María de la Cruz has her way of doing things, one step at a time. Because a family like yours has several needs, often all at once, and they need their pace. So, take a break. Because this is Sunday, day of rest. And the men, after their too-long week, need a drink, or two. And the mothers with the menus have to confer. And the aunts must confide about a parent, or two. While the kids need to talk and make spaceman faces, someone get a high chair for little Sarita! And Eloy, our athlete, needs to skateboard right now, across the *sala* on the just-waxed floor into the six-foot, revolving, scenic postcard rack. And we all need chips & salsa, three iced teas, seven more cokes, four more tequilas, one dry diaper, five crayolas and eight ballpoint pens. So join us, sit down. Stamps are free. And everyone here has a picture to write.

Woman Bidding a Soldier Goodby

—from a photo, 1912

I don't want you to leave. The train
goes nowhere. Your legs are already
deep in smoke. Or some kind of sewage
your fellows don't see. They call it
the ground. They're confident there,
in their door above the tracks. I'm here,
out front. Just the wick of my skirt
beginning to stain. A pool
that's rising. But you don't feel.
The train is open—a boxcar of militia.
So are my arms. And you're sinking,
love, sinking. In this liquid, this vapor—
whatever you'd believe. All I see
is smoke. If you chose it: Let it be.
Come, once more, kneel down
over me. Let me light your cigarette.
Our war is over. Now you've got yours.

The Tests

Yes I was shaking and I knew
it was the coffee, I came here
for the coffee, a stop after
the clinic, after Carmen
sat with me, her charts and
descriptions, the tests to take
or not depending on my wants
and hunches, depending more
on what I grasped in Spanish,
Carmen with her patience, me
with the same dictionary
I'd brought two years before
in the same wooden chair
as she underlined again the
scientific terms, though many
now were different, seemed
not at all the same: *levaduras*,
shigella, *vibrios*, names
of some bacteria I wouldn't
know in English; no, she said,
the tests will only locate
who is there or not, not call
them or pronounce them, you
really need not worry what
they are or what they do, how
your history shapes them
or avoids their presence
altogether, perhaps
your symptoms are not theirs
as we found some months ago;
things like this aren't rare,
she said, why should you know
the words, what didn't
happen then could easily
be the case today; you needn't
be responsible for what
was not the cause and never
there at all.

Thriller

The youngsters are terrific,
on stage at the plaza—

Four guitars, two keyboards, six
tambourines, flute and five sopranos,
three high tenors, three low altos,
four baritones; plus one deep,
powerful, five-foot three-inch bass,

Each dressed-up from Shakespeare,
a daring Romeo or enchanted Juliet,
with a portly, balding, bearded,
bespectacled man: the *Maestro*,
on accordion, in the center of them all:

We Are the World.

Remember Michael Jackson?
This was his song—

We are the World. We are the Children.

Twenty teens and tweens
with a sixty-something dude
on a makeshift wooden platform
in the middle of the street, all
going gangster's

And no one's sitting down.

Not a vacant place in twenty rows
of chairs, the steps of the cathedral, not
a spot on the walk. We're pressed together,
every single spectator, rising in a wave,
clapping, rapping, singing, dancing—

We are the Children. We are the World.

Lights and stars crackling the sky.
Balloons, rockets, blown sugar candy.
Six-year-olds and sparklers chasing
one another. Luminous, blinking
Mickey Mouse ears.