

Nancy Mercado**On Broadway**

Once more on my journey down Broadway from 107th Street
I make my usual stop in *La Embajada* Restaurant for that
First shot of coffee that transports me
To Mother's kitchen in Ponce
The sounds of little Javier's rooster
Just out back saluting the sun
85-year-old *Doña* Monce across the yard calling
Looking for mother's good morning

As I make my way down Broadway
Small hardware stores and delis
Open for business bristle with shoppers
Spanish streams from radios
Streams from hundreds of mouths
Hurrying down the streets
People go about their sacred routines

Down Broadway
In the Silver Moon Bakery
A young French man
Kneads slabs of dough
Transforming them
Into warm inviting loaves

An olive-skinned Dominican girl
Arranges the window
Of Rona's Dress Shop
As she might arrange
Her living room for guests

Behind the Famous Deli counter
Indian men smile revealing
Impeccably white teeth
Shimmering beyond their bronze skin
How beautiful they are

As I make my way down Broadway
I remember the winter it snowed 36 inches
Remember the man who chose to ski
Down the frozen avenue
En route to his first meal of the day
How I marveled at the sight of New York
Frozen in its morning and knew
I'd never see it this way again

Stanza Break

I pass Lincoln Center on my way down Broadway
 See Chagall's masterpieces wave to me
 From the Metropolitan Opera House
 See Dante Alighieri standing
 Amid tree canopies in the sun
 See Arnando's Afro-Cuban band
 Playing in the plaza
 And dancers swirling round
 The gushing fountain
 And the wealthy filling
 Balconies overhead
 Raising their champagne glasses
 Surveying the savage dancers below

Across the street I peek
 At Lincoln Plaza's marquee
 Read titles of Australian
 Italian and Japanese films
 Stop myself from going into
 The ice cream parlor next door
 Where small oval tables made of metal
 Are garnished with international ice cream eaters

Miniature art for sale line city sidewalks
 A fortuneteller calls out for customers
 From her corner there
 A book dealer peddles his cherished works here
 As crammed buses pull up
 To squeeze one more person in for the ride

Going down Broadway
 I pass Trump Towers' mammoth
 Silver globe perched in the clouds
 Notice teetering cranes stories above
 Another skyscraper going up
 And below subway nomads surge out
 From within their cave at 59th street

I arrive at the mouth
 Of Central Park
 Where bikers
 Runners
 Walkers
 Lovers coalesce

No Stanza Break

In an experiment begun long ago
There at the fountain's feet I sit
There I rest and gaze in awe
Once more on my journey down Broadway

New York at 26

Arriving in the City
I land at the base
Of the World Trade Center
There climb on mammoth escalators
Toward the sky
I'm swept-up by the current
Of a thousand people
Everyone here is important
Everyone a personality
Everyone part of New York City's life

Not far from those tall towers
Chinatown spins with activity
Chinese heard in the wind
Sidewalk carts
From corner to corner
Seafood for sale
Aromas permeate
The south end of the city
Sesame chicken aromas
Moo-shoo-pork
Garlic-eggplant aromas
People lineup for a good meal

Squeezing through the crowds
I cross Canal Street
Into Little Italy
There waiters wear
Long white aprons
There the smell of espresso
Snaps me to attention
There I see diners
Sitting in street cafés
Sipping red wine

They are lovers in my dreams

La Borinqueña PanaderíaIn *La Borriqueña Panadería*In *el Coto Laurel*

The workers speak Spanish

They have that dry Puerto Rican

Sense of humor

They bake bread daily

Make these little ham & cheese sandwiches

On hot dog bread we call *bocadillos*
mouthfulsIn *La Borinqueña*

They have Puerto Rican pastries

*Pastelillos**Tembleque**Flan*

And the aroma of newly cooked

Rice and beans and chicken

The people of

La Borinqueña Panadería

Make me feel

Warm and welcomed

Just like those in *La Rosita*On Broadway and 108th street

In New York City

El Coto Laurel

Dinner with mom

And with *tía Carmín*

Consists of a heavy soup

We call *Sancocho*

It consists of stories

About the exquisiteness

Of grandmother's cooking

How she stretched a sliver of onion

And little garlic cloves

During the Second World War

Enough to cook a pot

Of beans for two nights

How the taste of those beans

Could never be duplicated

Dinner with mom

And with *tía Carmín*

Consists of a warm sunset

White curtains flowing
In the kitchen
Annoying mosquitoes
Under the table
And highball glasses
Filled with passion juice

In My Perfect Puerto Rico

My gray mother would be
Combing her mother's white hair
On their turquoise painted porch
Under mango trees
Among hummingbirds

My black grandfather
In the next rocking chair
Happily looking on

My four-foot-eight cousin Sonia
Would be out back
In a wooden shack
Washing clothes
Or running in the garden
Tending to her dogs
She wouldn't walk with a limp
Wouldn't be sick
She'd have working kidneys
She'd live past thirty

My father would be hunting
All over this side of the island
With his best friend Angel Rodriguez
For reusable items
Dumped on the lush country side
They would be recycling pioneers

I would have a choice
Of which cousin to visit
We would still be young
And beautiful
Yolanda
Lili
Wanda
Evelyn
Ivelise
Hilly
We would still be together

And not just old scattered pieces
Of what we once were

Early Morning In Puerto Rico

for Oreo

Oreo stands at the edge
Of our wire-fence
Finishing her grave yard shift
As security dog
I see parts of her brown
Plump sausage-shaped body
Outside my bedroom window
Through mother's tall rose bush
Through vermilion *Amapolas*

I whisper in a high pitch to Oreo
See she waves
Her thick chocolate tail
Never leaving her post
Never turning an inch

It is five in the morning
The construction workers
Across the road
Have begun their day
Gathering in bunches
Having coffee
Cackling to one another
Before setting off to some
Far part of the island to labor

I take note
Of the sun's position as it rises
Take note of the sky for clouds
Decide whether today is a sea day
Or a hot-springs day
And hear the roosters
Converse to each other across miles

Silence

*Who could detain me with useless illusions
when my soul begins to complete its work?*

—Julia De Burgos

When the joker appears
With mouthfuls of shadows and smoke
Crazily waving his self-import in my face
Like flags waving front suburban homes
As if to cover the hate crimes of this country

When he yells to idle my mind
Spewing out vortexes in tongues
Filled with false virtues
Like commercials that mask
The plunder of impoverished lives
The enslavement of darker skin
The raping of female years

I know the joker is oblivious
That his time steadily dwindles
Like any man's life
That a pine box
A crematorium await him
Just as they await me
That he does not know
My silence is an impenetrable shield

The Dead

*Where I lay the dream of
following myself in your soul*

—Julia De Burgos

I face the universe
When I speak to the dead
I lay as they do
In their coffins
My body upright
Revealed to the wide expanse
Of the firmament

There I speak with mother
In some brightly-lit hallway

She says she is going

To sleep with father
His voice resonating from inside
A black room she enters

I often speak to the dead
They share their days with me
Provide advice
They have no wings
No halos
No emitting light from within
They're people just like you and like me