

Orlando Ricardo Menes

Homage to Lupe

They ate *bofe* – lungs of cattle –
leftovers if the mistress felt generous –
scandalous to neighbors when Lupe
joined us for Sunday suppers,

our mahogany table covered with red-
clay *cazuelas* of stews and fricassees rich
in fat. Bibbed jowl, she slurped lagoons
de salsita, chewed gristle, sucked bones.

Never laughed – oyster gums – but give
Lupe *aguardiente* and she'd sing, dance
Andean *huaynos*, feet stomping like stones,
medals jingling, a saint for every malady.

Jorobada we called her, humped since
age seven when she sowed potato eyes
with digging sticks, bore sacks of tungstite
ore down mountains thirteen thousand

feet closer to *Janaqpacha*, Inca heaven.
Knees like church knockers from scouring
rust, dirt, and mildew, big-boned hands
that sprinkled potato starch as she ironed

Papá's clothes, socks even, in a kitchen
facing St. Christopher's Hill, gray and arid,
cement cross on its peak. Before I'd learned
it in Spanish, Lupe taught me Our Holy

Father in Quechua, *the language stones*
would speak if they had mouths, and after Mass
 she'd take me to the convent where her favorite
 saint, Martín de Porres, healed lepers,

fed Lima's poor, turning water to milk,
 mud to bread. We'd take home bits of black
 cloth peddled as relics, in truth cheap
 polyester. When I had nightmares I'd slip

into her old fold-up bed by the laundry
 room, and Lupe would hold me till I fell
 asleep again, her arms soft pillows,
 her breath wet and heavy like ocean fog.

Miss Elliott

Princess Margaret School, Lima, 1967

Though Lima is coastal desert, its dank *garúa*
 more cold fog than drizzle, we sang *rain, rain, go away, come again*
another day, our classroom bare except for Union Jacks,
 one map of empire below the Big Ben clock.

Spines rigid against hardwood chairs,
 hands crisscrossed on wrought-iron desks, we chorused lines
 from *Alice in Wonderland* she'd chalk in perfect cursive,
 steel-tipped pointer thwacking the board when we sputtered
p's and b's, slurred our schwas, an angry Miss Elliott