

## “Afro-Latina” by Elizabeth Acevedo

Camina conmigo.  
 Salsa swagger  
 anywhere she go  
 como  
 ¡la negra tiene tumbao!  
 ¡Azúcar!  
 Dance to the rhythm.  
 Beat the drums of my skin.  
 Afrodescendant,  
 the rhythms within.  
 The first language  
 I spoke was Spanish.  
 Learned from lullabies  
 whispered in my ear.  
 My parents' tongue  
 was a gift  
 which I quickly forgot  
 after realizing  
 my peers did not understand it.  
 They did not understand me.  
 So I rejected  
 habichuela y mangú,  
 much preferring Happy Meals  
 and Big Macs.  
 Straightening my hair  
 in imitation of Barbie.  
 I was embarrassed  
 by my grandmother's  
 colorful skirts  
 and my mother's  
 eh brokee inglee  
 which cracked my pride  
 when she spoke.  
 So, shit, I would poke fun  
 at her myself,  
 hoping to lessen  
 the humiliation.  
 Proud to call myself  
 American,  
 a citizen  
 of this nation,  
 I hated  
 Caramel-color skin.  
 Cursed God

I'd been born  
 the color of cinnamon.  
 How quickly we forget  
 where we come from.  
 So remind me,  
 remind me  
 that I come from  
 the Taínos of the río  
 the Aztec,  
 the Mayan,  
 Los Incas,  
 los Españoles  
 con sus fincas  
 buscando oro,  
 and the Yoruba Africanos  
 que con sus manos  
 built a mundo  
 nunca imaginado.  
 I know I come  
 from stolen gold.  
 From cocoa,  
 from sugarcane,  
 the children  
 of slaves  
 and slave masters.  
 A beautifully tragic mixture,  
 a sancocho  
 of a race history.  
 And my memory  
 can't seem to escape  
 the thought  
 of lost lives  
 and indigenous rape.  
 Of bittersweet bitterness,  
 of feeling innate,  
 the soul of a people,  
 past, present and fate,  
 our stories cannot  
 be checked into boxes.  
 They are in the forgotten.  
 The undocumented,  
 the passed-down spoonfuls  
 of arroz con dulce  
 a la abuela's knee.

They're the way our hips  
 skip  
 to the beat of cumbia,  
 merengue  
 y salsa.  
 They're in the bending  
 and blending  
 of backbones.  
 We are deformed  
 and reformed  
 beings.  
 It's in the sway  
 of our song,  
 the landscapes  
 of our skirts,  
 the azúcar  
 beneath our tongues.  
 We are  
 the unforeseen children.  
 We're not a cultural wedlock,  
 hair too kinky for Spain,  
 too wavy for dreadlocks.  
 So our palms  
 tell the cuentos  
 of many tierras.  
 Read our lifeline,  
 birth of intertwine,  
 moonbeams  
 and starshine.  
 We are every  
 ocean crossed.  
 North Star navigates  
 our waters.  
 Our bodies  
 have been bridges.  
 We are the sons  
 and daughters,  
 el destino de mi gente,  
 black  
 brown  
 beautiful.  
 Viviremos para siempre  
 Afro-Latinos  
 hasta la muerte