

# SHE HAD BROWN HANDS<sup>1</sup>

Claudia Rodriguez

I.

She had brown hands that led her five-year-old in a dance  
She had brown hands spotted with brown dots like a flour tortilla  
She had brown hands that trembled as she counted rent money knowing she had  
\$10 left over to feed her babies  
She had brown hands inchadas cómo una concha recién horniada, calientes  
despues de planchar lavado ajeno.

II.

She had brown hands con uñas rojas y puntiagudas como un pincel doing their  
brush work against the rough skin of her back setting it afire. Red, fire-rivers ran  
from her shoulders to the small of her back.  
She had brown hands fuertes like a tortilleras, got into her, despertando sueños  
profundos.  
She had brown hands delicadas like an abuela's, caressed softness she didn't know  
she had like the laughter trapped in between shoulder blades.  
She had brown hands, brown hands that covered her eyes, cupped her mouth,  
restricted her breath; fit perfectly around her throat.  
She had brown hands perfect for and collecting her offerings, shiny, silky, sopping,  
ejaculates that erupted cause her brown hands read her body like braille.

## III.

She had brown hands, gripping black hands, and white hands and old hands forming a human chain of resistance, cutting the 101 freeway, refusing to let another jail go up.

#JusticeLA #BlackLivesMatter

She had brown hands that balled and shot into the air in protest, "POWER TO THE PEOPLE!" Angry punches against injustices, the polluted LA air ricocheting off her chants.

She had brown hands, wiping beads of sweat, her palms also moist from the August heat, the energy urging to change the course for young men of color was palpable.

## IV.

She had brown hands scarred from scorched metal. A hot metal star branded on the backside, a moon on her middle finger, viper teeth on her wrist.

She had brown hands that liked to punch walls, hitting just enough to pull back not all the way broken. Hidden childhood habits that she kept too much in contact with.

She had brown hands that weren't able to block, protect, embrace.

She had brown hands that knew how to lose her down a trail of cuentos

She had brown hands that gave her the courage her mouth often suppressed, emboldened with a grip of the pen.

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Inspired by Harjo, Joy. 2008, 1983. *She Had Some Horses*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

## ANGEL OF MERCY

*para Chavela*

Claudia Rodriguez

I.

Ángel terrenal

que aterrizó como un torero joven  
y seguro de sí mismo, con los pies firmemente  
plantados en suelo mexicano,  
en el medio de la época dorada,  
enfrentando los cuernos del machismo  
y la homofobia, ella que nunca fue disuadida  
y nunca desgarrada.  
Sin necesidad de usar traje de luces  
siempre abrazada por su jorongo  
rojo y negro vestuario digno de un apóstol de la canción

II.

Ángel de la misericordia  
de pie en el escenario  
con sus manos alzadas  
hacia el cielo  
ojos llenos de lágrimas  
suspendidas por la eternidad  
negándose a ceder al dolor.  
Venas que palpitan por el calor del tequila  
la frente brillante bañada por las luces.  
Ella nos liberó del peso de nuestro dolor  
con su llanto disfrazado de rancheras  
guiado por el rasgueo de las guitarras  
y el lamento de las trompetas.

## TACOS DE SITIO Y LENGUA<sup>1</sup>

Claudia Rodriguez

Here I sit rejecting colonial ideology

con mi tortilla en la mano

de maíz of course

the physical and spiritual sustenance

de mis antepasados

affirming Chicana space con mi taco

taco de lengua speaking my memories

not of molestation,

spatial memories

in my Amá's kitchen, I see it

the big cow tongue in the sink

waiting to be cooked then coated

with cilantro, cebolla y salsa roja

my patriotic taco in my hand ready to fill my

mouth but not plug it up—¡soy hocicona!

Hoy yo ya no como lengua I just SPIT it

like al pastor, layered

verse after verse con un onion

on top, cause I can make you cry.

My lengua pocha cooked in a single parent  
 household filled with problematic corridos  
 dancing around con Amá,  
 ignoring los chillidos de Delgadina like  
 los once criados.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Space and language, a phrase coined by Emma Pérez in her essay, "Sexuality and Discourse: Notes from a Chicana Survivor" in Carla Trujillo's edited volume, *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About*, published in 1991 by Third Woman Press. It speaks to the Chicana imaginary as being one that rejects colonial ideology and the by-products of colonialism and capitalist patriarchy—sexism, racism, homophobia, etc.

# PARADIGM SHIFT

Claudia Rodriguez

It's a new paradigm!

Chicana and Chicano studies started  
it when they gave me the path  
to this expressive arts track  
and here I lay tracks  
as a means to keep  
track of my ideas.

I'm the mother of the Teortilla!  
Centeotl god of maíz listened  
to my prayers blessing me  
with a cosecha to share  
this wicked wiki  
a paradigm shift.

Just wrap your mind around it  
like a rubber band around your wrist  
you pull 'n snap it each bad thought  
you get, like  
"Ew, this is bad."

"Her shit's not theory!"

You deny me the connectivity  
of this literary device to lecture?

Here I conjecture  
no longer looking at my fractured parts  
in the mirror  
Baby, Bhabha  
wishing, desiring to be whole  
but my face is a kaleidoscope  
multi-interpretations  
changing the medium  
changing the delivery.  
It's all theory!  
Revisionist poetry  
to tell my story  
politicizing the personal  
like scholactivism  
you can take the scholar out  
of the barrio but you can't take  
the barrio out of the scholar.