

## El Caiman

Antonio Reyes

This story is true.  
 While my uncle prepared nieve  
 De nuez, over white, cold cream  
 Of sugar, coconuts and almonds, he told  
 Us about El Caiman, el niño loco del barrio. The uncles, surrounding,  
 Nodded in agreement, as if they were there, I was there.  
 With my uncle's words, I saw El Caiman in the black window,  
 And as dinner carried on with his tale, I became El Caiman.

Before the bus station became a neon supermarket,  
 Before el *Cine Reforma* became tienda *Del Sol*,  
 Before all these things out-populated the stone,  
 Carved cathedrals and poorly painted  
 Cantinas of Guanajuato,  
 In the San Javier neighborhood,  
 I was El Caiman.  
 To well-combed, uniform-wearing children,  
 To their mothers walking them to school,  
 To the tired officers directing lines of green taxis with weak, pointing  
 fingers,  
 To the holy sister staring at the dusty, leather-coat-wearing, mullet-  
 haircut, 1960s Rock 'n' Roll, head-banging banda known as Los  
 Zorrillos,  
 To those lonely workers, who've never met my mother or spent the  
 night briefly holding her,

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To that shattered mundo, I was known as El Pinche Loco,  
And I do not know why.

Every day I wore jeans that had a few  
Tears around the knees and brown shirts  
That used to be white like my mother.  
My shirts were like my skin, bruised,  
Brown, and dark enough to make boots.  
When my lips cracked with the dry  
Air, I would spit like a fountain  
Until my mouth was soft and red.  
When the pigeons or streets bored  
Me, I would drum my alligator belly and sing  
A song my father once taught me.  
I do not know the words, I lacked diction,  
The ability to properly pronounce, but that could  
Not stop the beat a dead man taught me.

If my song was heard in the streets,  
Children would laugh as my fingers flapped,  
Some would clap, until tall grim shadows  
Would walk and pull the children back  
Into the crowd of disappointment and disgust.  
They would trace me with the word  
Loco and I did not know why. I would  
Wave my fingers the same way my father  
Waved his after a victorious cockfight.  
I would try to say "hola" the same way  
My brother met smiling girls, but they  
Would stare, and my jeans would be wet  
And I would walk home carrying Loco  
On my shoulders.

Loco knows of the knife cuts the Zorrillos

Gave me outside the bar. Loco knows  
Of the pushes I got from passengers  
On the bus. Loco knows of my mother,  
Her moans, and knows she wears  
Lipstick at night. Loco knows  
My father bet too big with his rooster  
And lost against angry men in suits.  
Loco knows he found me before dying.  
Loco knows el mundo wants to prick him  
Out of me like shanties  
Near developing neighborhoods,  
Loco knows how el mundo knows of him,  
And ignoring is the world's gun against Loco.

I do not know why  
I am El Pinche Loco.  
One morning, before mass,  
Before every church bell in San Javier  
Woke the sleeping mundo, I joined  
The barking dogs of San Javier,  
Cold and free.  
I stared at the world, while Loco  
Waved with my wet clothes  
On the clothesline. I danced  
With the church bells and screamed  
To the walkers while my own  
Bells swayed. La fiesta, my only fiesta,  
Fiesta de locos.

The gasping mothers crossed themselves  
Like speeding taxis crossing streets  
And gasped, *El Pinche Loco*,  
The tired officer joined la fiesta  
With his whistles and the children laughed.

Todos locos en la locura  
Viendo el adios del Pinche loco,  
I jumped to the sun and my skin blended  
Perfectly with the morning shine over  
The brown cerros.  
I am El Caiman,  
I died El Caiman.  
Free like a caiman  
In the swamps.

Drips of melted nieve streamed down his plastic cup,  
as he explained how the newspaper printed in black,  
he died, *un loco*. One uncle said he was shot  
In the back by his mother.  
We really did not know  
El Caiman.

## Verano Vida

Antonio Reyes

*Me dieron razon que andavas en la tierra Michoacana*  
 “Caminos de Michoacan”

Summer’s sunlight over our Asian-crafted,  
 American-dreamt shoes. From the barred  
 Windows we see open land *For Sale*,  
 A soccer field for a moment, filled with wild  
 Elated escuincles. Some barefoot, toothless,  
 All drumming dust onto their dirty  
 Playeras. Flies swarming over their Copa  
 Mundial, annoyingly buzzing like vuvuzelas,  
 The swarms agitate the Jehovah and Sunday  
 School students entering the immortalized  
 Iglesias. Down the uneven Cuamio road,  
 A commotion of debates, cerveza  
 Tall tales and gossip take place outside  
 The small cantina. Some homeless rancheros  
 With cereza-like eyes sit inside the shaded  
 Room. Campesinos and farmers with leather  
 Skin and black pistols sit outside, underneath  
 Large umbrellas. The red *Sol* logo on the umbrella  
 Fades under the sun. A skinny horse next to the crowd  
 Defecates and stares at los niños,  
 Screaming, ¡*Gol, no fue falta, me la pelas,*  
*Penal, la tuya,* and *huevos puto!* The locals  
 Pressing cold, sweaty Caguamas of *Indio, Victoria*

Or *Sol* onto their tired skin, laugh and converse  
With deported Chicanos, the visiting  
Chilangos, las Comadres returning  
From Morelia with unsold mole powder,  
Los Compadres returning from Uruapan  
In their 90s pick-ups, Los Carteles,  
Hidden among them, and the Cantineros  
Cobrando past tabs and serving them all  
Below a bright Coca-Cola billboard.  
Fruitful moments blending with mariachi  
And corridos de Michoacan ramps on,  
Until a cool gust ends the joy,  
And as the bright moonlight  
Marches into the sky, the local patrol,  
Young military and men dressed like agents  
Fall in at various hours.  
Never running into each other,  
Unless they have to take down  
Or pick up a body. By then most of los  
Borrachos have left before the moon could  
Hang over their laughs, mumbling songs and guilt.  
The kids have left the field, groups of teenagers  
Have set hut around the dusty ground.  
A perfect cushion for couples to smoke,  
Comadriar y andar de calientes.  
Los sicarios are still in la cantina and running  
Their endless tab. The bartender waits  
For a heavy stare from them to know  
When to close, serve another round  
Or pay an illegal tax. The old men with their pistols  
Are still in la cantina, drinking lemonade  
Instead. They watch over the bartender  
Like an angel, but like everyone sleeping  
In their home tonight, they are scared. I left

Michoacan before I could hear their fear  
From their beating hearts. I never stay to see  
The moon over the monarch-filled hills  
Of Michoacan because I am scared, too.

*But it is true,  
I, too, was and was not  
In Michoacan.*