

Gulf Winds

It's only when the high winds blow that I wish my hair was long
Sailing through the autumn leaves singing an ancient song
Or falling in love in the streets at night at the edge of a local square
It's only that I'm here tonight thinking I was there

There are high winds on the pier tonight, my soul departs from me
Striding like Thalia's ghost south on the murky sea
And into midnight's tapestry she fades, ragged and wild
Searching down her ancestry in the costume of a Persian child

And gulf winds bring me flying fish that shine in the crescent moon
Show me the horizon where the dawn will break anew
And cool me here on this lonely pier where the heron are flying low
Echo the songs my father knew in the towns of Mexico

When I was young my eyes were wise, my father was good to me
Instead of having a flock of sons he had two other girls and me
And if we had used our Spanish names, here's the way they'd run
Thalia, Margarita and Juanita, I'm the middle one.

The screen door kept the demons in as we moved from town to town
It's hard to be a princess in the States when your skin is brown
And mama smoothed my worried brow as I leaned on the kitchen door
Why do you carry the weight, she said, of the world and maybe more?

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My grandfathers were ministers and it came on down the line
My father preached in his parents' church when he was ten years and nine
And mama dressed in parishoners' clothes and didn't believe in hell
Her daddy fought the DAR, if he'd lived I'd have known him well

They said go find a Sunday School, we must have tried them all
I never stole from the silver plate, my sisters had more gall
One preacher said sing out loud and clear, it's the only life you've got
And the next one said be good on earth, you've another life at the feet of God

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My father turned down many a job just to give us something real
It's hard to be a scientist in the States when you've got ideals
And mama kept the budget book, she kept the garden, too
Bought fish from the man on Thursday, fed all of us and strangers, too

But time will pass and so, alas, will most of what we know
Though tonight my memory's eye is clear as the story's being told
And I'll play ball with the underdog and sit with the child who's wrong
Be still when the earth is silent and sing when my strength is gone

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Now father's going to India sometime in the fall
They tried to stay together but you just can't do it all
I'll think about him if he goes, there's a little grey in his hair
Though not much because he's Mexican, they don't age, they just prepare

And if he goes to India I'll miss him most of all
He'll see me in the mudlarks' face, hear me in the beggar's call
And mama will stay home, I guess, and worry if she did wrong
And I'll say a prayer for both of them and sing them both my song

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