From a Puerto Rican girl that doesn’t know Spanish

Who am I?

Well, I don’t fucking know.

Let’s see, I’m a Puerto Rican girl

born and raised in the Bronx

by a father who constantly reminds

us all of the times when I used to

tap dance for him and mommy,

and a mother who reminisces on

the nights I used to point at the

moon and call out “la Luna, la Luna.”

Mommy said that one day I went to

school and came back knowing only

English. Daddy has no comment on

this. I asked her how this could be

possible, how I could lose my native tongue?

She doesn’t have an answer, so now when I go to school,

I don’t know how to explain to my Spanish teachers or

my Latina friends that I can’t understand what they’re saying

and they ask, “but aren’t you Puerto Rican?” And I’m like, fuck,

now I’m not Spanish enough, excuse me, Latina enough for my

Spanish teachers who expect me to translate things to the non-natives

and my Latina friends who’ve been to DR every summer since they’ve been born

and I don’t even know what part of PR my grandparents come from.

Oh how I long to see mi isla. It’s funny how I’m always told “you look Dominican”

until I correct them and say “no, yo soy Puerto Riqueña” and they’ll say

“now that I think about it, you do sound Puerto Rican.” Then the code-switching

from Español to Ingles begins despite the fact that I’ve now learned

to understand my native language, but still can’t speak it. And I’m sure

now you’re thinking, “that’s so Puerto Rican.” So let me tell you about

my grandmother. She was a funny woman, kinda crazy and a party girl. They say

I look just like her. Our relationship was an interesting one. She understood all

my English and I understood all her Spanish. That’s how we worked. Ask her

to say her address in Ingles and she’ll say it real fast in her Puerto Rican accent

so that you can’t hear her fuck up. But I still understood her. See, she was the

one cooking that real good shit, that arroz con habichuelas and some type

of meat on the side. I looked forward to it every day after school. For holidays,

she used to make tembleque just for me and only me. My mom

used to get tight at her because she’d have to come home from a long

day of work to a dirty ass stove and scrub away the dried up oil stains

for hours. When Malen died, my mom wished she had oil stains to

still clean up. I wished I still had a grandmother to speak English to.

Now it meant I had to learn how to be Puerto Rican all on my own.

The learning is still in progress. It started with my hair. I no longer

had a grandmother to force relaxers and blow dryers on me. I came

to college with a head full of curls. Malen would’ve told me to comb

that shit out and I would’ve had to just because she said so. But where

did my hair texture come from? I remember in middle school my aunt

telling me about the Taínos in what was then Borinquén and what is

now Puerto Rico and I thought “omg I’m Indian, how fucking cool.”

But little did I know that I am here because of rape, murder and

slavery. And now I think about the last name “Hernandez”

and whether or not I should really be proud of that as being a part

of my identity. And I think about how pressed I am for knowing

English better than Spanish when neither were never meant to be

mis lenguas. But then I think about how rich my culture is infused

with that of the Spaniard, the African and the Taino. And then I realize

I wouldn’t wanna be anything else. Imma jack Puerto Rican till the day I die.