

COCKROACHES, GREASE, AND OTHER JOKES

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Preamble: Man of 64 sits hunched behind his cluttered desk where a blood sugar meter peeks out of a leather messenger bag. The room: spacious, shady, and cool with only one small, uncovered window near the ceiling. A gooseneck lamp shines over the plexiglass print he is etching. He is not alone however, over by one of the many bookshelves a student sketches. The usuals will crowd the room later.

“Oh hey! Glue sniffer! I’m glad you came! I’ve actually been meaning to tell you... and pay attention... you gotta stop listening to those little fuckers. They are not your friends. You know when I lived back in Berkeley California; I was twenty-one, a little older than you. I was amidst the student movements and the Panthers. It was the 60’s, that’s when I discovered Frank Zappa” [squints and pretends to hold joint] “Hey man you want some pot. Take it easy.” It was just the two of us. One summer me and my girlfriend Eleftheria hitchhiked from New York to Berkeley. So, she could go study politics. And I didn’t have anything better to do, so what the fuck.

But I really loved her. Anyway, we settled down. I got good pay. And I was naive and I made a couple of friends/ Luis, Daniel, and Jack, Rusty and... and... and se me olvida el nombre... Phillip. We met at the bar for some beer every night. I needed it to relax and socialize. You know, I was a nervous guy.

So, when Eleftheria died in the plane crash [sniffs] and I lost my job. And I couldn’t buy them drinks anymore. You think they were there? Puff! And I’m telling you this because you need to learn that lesson now, that’s just how people are. You think they give a fuck but everybody is just trying to scratch their own asses. Really. Peeroo mamita nooo te ponga así. You know why I’m telling you this? I see you, I used to be a shy little bookworm. Yeah! Believe it! I’m still shy guy. You don’t see me gossiping around like all the other teachers. And you have all this faith in them. So, I’m only telling you this cuz I see myself in you. I didn’t have no friends either.

Those kids aren't intellectual like you are. You can't expect them to understand you. Some people just don't care about their friends in the vegetable kingdom.

And I was back **there**.

So, all I heard was "Goddamn Spik!"

Trust me you don't wanna be a little brown Puerto Rican kid enclosed by New York City.

Men those days wore shiny black pointed toe shoes
 Like the ones you like to wear
 they called them mata cucarachas
 you know cuz they fit perfectly into the providential corners
 made to corner cockroaches
 so you can squish them just right
 Squish them so you can hear the anesthetic crunch
 of a crushed "cockroach on a low-income housing project"
 Irrevocably engulfed by the walloped walls of wailing walk-ups
 the animal finally melds with the untouchable bums and other sacred excrements
 of nature

The grease on their shoes always shone a little less than the starry sweat
 of our coarse conked hair
 [insert Franki Valli here:
 I solve my problem and I see the light
 This is the life of illusion
 Wrapped up in trouble, laced with confusion
 What are we doing here?]
 We had to hang out with all the Italians
 They weren't considered white until we showed up
 My sister wanted to marry an Italian before becoming a zombie to happiness'
 warm gun

...well what she actually wanted was the adoration of a handsome Sicilian
 I wish she would have known Sicilians are the SPIKS of Italy
 when Tommi Carusso left her
 Sicily was inundated by African Moors in the year
 eight hundred twenty-six A.D.
 Sicilians ran the whole neighborhood

So my house on top a bakery always smelled of yeast and fermented olive oil
 and the fumes of the metallic carbon oven aggravated the perspiration
 which streamed down from the shallow sky

unto our ceiling
 down our forehead
 and out our domesticated eyes
 perspiration which would then circle around our wide round noses
 before salting the white patches on my parents' tasteless tongues
 So I would imagined a force, an acid of nauseating ebony,
 with the distinct odor of my father's liquid mistress
 a force gulped from birth like our starving matriarch's onion milk
 milk which nourished our delirium and dehydrated our rarely caressed felt skin
 daemonic force which would eventually sprout alone in our stomachs
 and mold into necrophilic branches of industrial steel
 until it colonized our limbs and
 inevitably emerged from our coiled throats
 by taking the form of expatriated wails
 wails that saturated our murky rose tears
 and blunted our plastic rosary
 It rooted its way into our veins like a child's love
 all while singing the coastal sugar cane melody of
 coquí
 coquí
 coquí
 in search for freedom
 or the warm embrace of a sunbeam filled breeze
 or at least for the ecstasy of Santa Teresa

So... you want to go to New York. Be careful. You're very pale and pretty, you are, and you're smart. You remind me of Eleftheria. But all that's gone once you tell them where you're from. And you might not know it and they might not know it. But they hate you. So don't you dare get trusting and lazy. You know you're lazy. We're all lazy. But you gotta think for yourself and know your history. And then they'll hate you more because you won't let them erase what they've taken. Pero así nadie te coge de pendeja. A veces creo que este país lo gobierna hasta Pinocho.

I moved back here in the 70's cuz I just couldn't take it there. I wanted to come back to where I came from. But I came here to realize I was Nuyorrican. And we were just fighting amongst ourselves cuz we couldn't be them. But no one cares about our friends in the vegetable kingdom. Even the progressives. Let me tell you something about el PIP. They preach equality for women while maintaining two or three wives todas escondías en la cocina. Es que se creían que ellos mismos tenían que engendrar gente pa' que les votara. Se pasaban de casa en casa. Como Toño bicicleta.

“Preciosa, Preciosa, te llaman los hijos de la libertad.” But when it comes down to it all those lazy corrupt fucks running the country put their kids in an English speaking- prep school. Saint John’s School. And they always wanna sell you that we need to be like the bloody Ame... [the bell rings and the audience moves away] [Simone and Garfunkel’s “The Only Living Boy in New York” begins to play over the poorly lit background]



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