

**Did You Take the Coquí with You?**

*Written by Cristina A. Perez*

**Bite**

I wonder how long it will take  
for the mosquitoes to bite me  
when we land in Puerto Rico  
A welcome from this home that was never home to me

Or maybe it's a warning  
The island telling me  
*"Go home.  
Leave.  
You don't belong here  
anymore."*

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**On the Third Day, the Rain Came**

It rained on the third day  
The day we went to the birthplace of my grandma & grandpa  
San Sebastián  
The day we visited the gravesite  
The burial spot of Grandpa Maño  
Of grandma's sister and her parents  
all who I never met,  
or at least, have no memory of any of them  
I only know Manuel Antonio Perez Rodriguez  
Known to me as Grandpa Maño  
My favorite grandfather

However, when we arrived at the gravesite,  
a month before the five year anniversary of his passing,  
the rain left completely  
And the sun was as bright as it was when he was first buried there

*"Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live." John 11:25*

*(English translation of the verse on Maño's headstone)*

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**Surrealism**

Vacation is a surreal experience  
 It's feels like nothing in the world is actually happening  
 Everything is just on pause  
 Or taking a break as we soak in this time off  
 The news headlines don't seem real  
 Everyday work doesn't matter  
 Maybe this break is going to put everything back into focus  
 Or maybe it's distractingly out of focus like a surrealist painting  
 And I'm seeing Dalí's clocks here  
 Making it feel like I'm almost in another dimension  
 where "I lived in Puerto Rico with my people"  
 I just feel so good right now  
 —it almost doesn't seem real

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**Idolization**

I think I made an idol out of you  
 Like most of my idols,  
 I did not intend to make an idol  
 I know the Ten Commandments  
 Yet I think I turned you into an idol  
 I did not want to acknowledge, or even know your faults  
 As I listen to my cousin,  
 my father,  
 I am reminded that you were not perfect  
 That I was never meant to worship you  
 But I think so highly of you  
*I revere you*  
 I think I made you one of my idols  
 I'm sorry

God, I did not mean to make Heaven seem better because of the people I have lost and look  
 forward to seeing again  
 When the purpose of Heaven is living in true paradise with the Lord  
 Not my grandfather  
 Not my lost sibling  
 Not anyone else  
 I'm sorry I made him an idol  
 I never meant to  
 I should have stopped before  
 But it's so hard to let go  
 Help me let go  
 Help me lose this idol without losing my love for them

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### **The Trees Bear Witness**

In Puerto Rico, there are so many trees on this tropical island of mine  
 Trees that have remained for hundreds, maybe even thousands of years  
 You can tell it's been such a long time just by looking at them  
 The trees are so large and thick—  
 they almost look overgrown

These trees must have been here for over 500 years at least  
 These trees must have witnessed all the history of Puerto Rico  
 Beyond the 500 years I try to research  
 Because that's as far as the written word can tell me anything beyond theory  
 I imagine the trees bear witness to the true history of Borikén

These trees remained after the first European invaders came  
 The trees were there to witness the invaders genocide of Borikén's people  
 Through disease, battles, slavery, abuse, and more.  
 The trees witnessed that some of Borikén's people remained  
 like the trees themselves  
 While others jumped into the ocean to avoid the inevitable  
 The trees saw that too

The trees bore witness when Borikén officially became Puerto Rico  
 The trees heard when Borikén was renamed after it's use, a rich port,  
 to these invaders who began to live on this land

The trees saw Borikén's people number dwindle drastically and continuously  
 The trees witnessed another group of people come with the invaders  
 But most of these new people came in chains  
 The trees saw the new people treated similar to the people of Borikén

The trees became so horrified with all that happened in less than 100 years  
 They could not look anymore  
 They refused to look  
 But they kept hearing everything—  
 The invaders language become the language of the land  
 The sound of bullets and bombs  
 The anguish of the people who came in chains  
 and Borikén's people that remained  
 The trees heard battles and revolts  
 The trees heard pleas of freedom and mercy  
 from the earth  
 from gods  
 from God  
 The trees heard too much

The trees begged God to no long bear witness

The trees begged God to let them be cut down  
To burn in the breeze,  
or be thrown into the sea  
The trees could bear witness no longer

God heard the trees

Some he granted a hurricane to take them into the sea  
Some were pulled by their roots out of the earth  
While other trees' pleas, God refused to grant  
He told the trees it was their job to bear witness  
To be a testament of history

But more than the cruelty and evil of man,  
The trees were to be testaments of God  
To demonstrate growth,  
despite tragedy,  
Demonstrating strength and durability to remain and not bend to the evil of man  
To demonstrate hope and life

For even the trees that bear witness can remain and endure  
How much more will God be near to us to remain and endure?  
How much deliverance and freedom is offered with the promise of Heaven?

If the trees continue to bear witness to both good and evil,  
cannot we be relieved that our time to bear witness ends sooner than the trees?

Now, all the trees clap their hands  
rejoicing to their creator God  
for only the goodness of the land  
and the death of evil men

The trees bear witness  
and they clap their hands

*"...and all the trees of the field will clap their hands." Isaiah 55:12b*