

malcolm meets tite curet alonso at hemingway's café, pittsburgh,

and of course i don't recognize him at first. by which i mean he looks like any other brother sipping on something hard in this bar. the only reason i notice him is the tints of white and gray in his beard and eyebrows. until i look a little closer and see it's really bits of bone speckled over on his face. and i lean in a little closer, can hear him humming notes from maelo, el conde, la lupe, cheo—all tunes he wrote. and so i sit next to him, order two more of what he's ordered and when i take a sip all i taste is molasses but the more i drink the more i can hear him. two sips and the hum is louder. three and i can hear lyrics. four and a whole ocean starts to sway with each tune—every note becomes driftwood piecing itself back together into a boat. and i get to the bottom of the glass but instead of leftover ice there are iron-wrought chains. and i want to jerk my body away but i still feel this ocean swaying all through my nerves and he's looking back at me so i order two more drinks instead. and we keep drinking. and i'm all seasick but he sits steady. and i try to ask *don tite, why are you doing this?* but the words come out all slurred and dizzy. and the ceiling starts spinning. and his songs start pounding around my skull. and as i'm about to fall off my stool he grabs my arm. says *¿entiendes, m'ijo? this is what it means to channel the ancestors. this is how your body becomes theirs. can you handle it, all that sloshing in the pit of your stomach?*