

Extrañando Is Lost in Translation By Anyely Dickerson

Google translate teaches you
the word *extrañando* means *missing*—as in the verb *to miss*
something or someone
as in *I'm missing you*
or *te estoy extrañando*.

But *extrañando*
is so much more...

extrañando is
your Cuban brain flooded with
Spanish words in search of an English
one that won't ever come because
there's no literal translation for *empalagar*—sure it stems from
the idea of overdoing it like feeling stuffed after a large meal
but in Spanish it's exacting—it's precise—it's indulging in too many sweets
so you can't just tell that colleague at the office party
Your cake overly sweetened me!

You can't
can you? —not without
sounding stupid—sounding completely immigrant—so I keep quiet
as an onslaught of unsuitable English choices
thrash around my head like rusty nails in a dented coffee can.

extrañando is
biting into a hamburger and wishing it was
a Cubano instead—one built on pride and freshly baked
Cuban bread layered with seasoned pork
between slices of salty jamón and Swiss cheese
pickles and tangy yellow mustard
all pressed on a hot heavy plancha as old and strong as
the dreams of the waitress who makes them.

extrañando is
not quite a full-fledged yearning but rather
a nostalgic glimpse you know won't last—your memory's impression of
that abuelita hanging her laundry—trying to dry it
by morning in a clothesline hanging across a crumbling
wrought-iron balcony in La Habana because
it's Sunday and it's 3 PM
and back home the ocean breeze is strong
and you remember her routine
with tears in your eyes.

extrañando is
the taste of blood in your
mouth after you bite your lip to keep
from screaming as your teacher—the mean one with the
gray tooth that wiggles when she speaks,
wants to you settle down because to her ears
excitement sounds barbaric
an uncivilized foreign chaos but instead of
scolding you, she ridicules you by proclaiming:
You Cubans are too loud

and that's when you imagine yourself
shoulder to shoulder with every Cuban
that's ever been—an endless string of precious pearls
strung up from every Habana rooftops
to the central peaks of the Sierra Maestra
all shouting all at once in a synchronized LOUDNESS that
shakes the whole of Earth in a thunderous
soundwave.

extrañando is
heading to the club with friends and
sitting on the sidelines all night
because it's Techno Tuesday and your body
rejects the repetitive electronic tempo—fighting it like a virus
because it wants the home-grown flavors of
salsa, mambo y danzón—el cuerpo
pide rumba y timbales
pide son y guaguancó
even a bit of Cubaton—Reggaeton *a lo Cubano*
but at the very least you need
la CLAVE
with its syncopated pa-pa-pa / pa-pa
pa-pa-pa / pa-pa
the island heartbeat.

extrañando is
feeling the first flakes of snow on your face as you walk about
your concrete jungle and wishing they were
raindrops instead—raindrops after a tropical storm—the wayward kind
that fall from the emerald wings of
a Cuban parakeet flying low
toward the salty edge of Cienfuegos
before returning home to its evening perch high
in the Escambray Mountains to slumber and wake
to another morning on your sun kissed island
en el CARIBE.

extrañando is
when you dream in a
kaleidoscope of memories
fragments and cries—a dream
de pirulí y duro frío
de tías y sonrisas, de abuelas y chancletasos
de carnaval y buñuelos

extrañando the
dreams of Nochebuena de moros y cristianos
con strong cafecitos y buttery tostadas
sueños de vida y boleros viejos
dreams of quinces y funerarios
to celebrate life and celebrate
death.

extrañando is
longing for a life you did not live without
regret for the one you lead—it's so much more than *missing*
something or someone...

extrañando
mi tierra y mi gente
our flavors and
our LOUD.

I long to hear that warmest of greetings
¿Aseré, qué bolá?
words that anchor me to the innocence of a forgotten childhood...

extrañando with a heaviness
and sorrow the pride of a Cuban people—pride forged in the fires of
oppression and sweat sweetened by our
sugar cane—sugar so sweet it runs through us
like the CLAVE and its pa-pa-pa/pa-pa pounding in our
CORAZONES
forever una mezcla inseparable
de azúcar y canción.

Maybe it's time I wrote to Google
help them straighten out their tool
because all these words LOST in translation
make a mockery of us all—and leave us LONGING
for the truth—LONGING for those special
words that taste of HOME.