New York at 17

Stepping into the Waldorf Astoria lobby
For the first time feels like
Stepping into the Million Dollar Movie
Breathless I stand staring
At graceful chandeliers
At wine-colored Persian rugs
The finest comforters
Beneath my feet

I am an explorer walking with trepidation
Discovering what is unknown
My mother’s daughter
Afraid of doing something wrong

But no one says anything
No one interrupts my expedition
As I enter the powder room
The one bigger than
Our Atlantic City train-row apt
The powder room where
Like Natalie Wood
I recline on a chaise lounge
That stunning cushioned place
Dressed in pinks and mauve
And shiny brass fixtures
That beautiful room
With velvet running water

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New York at 26

Arriving in the City
I land at the base
Of the World Trade Center
There climb on mammoth escalators
Toward the sky
I’m swept-up by the current
Of a thousand people
Everyone here is important
Everyone a personality
Everyone part of New York City’s life

Not far from those tall towers
Chinatown spins with activity
Chinese heard in the wind
Sidewalk carts
From corner to corner
Seafood for sale
Aromas permeate
The south end of the city
Sesame chicken aromas
Moo-shoo-pork
Garlic-eggplant aromas
People lineup for a good meal

Squeezing through the crowds
I cross Canal Street
Into Little Italy
There waiters wear
Long white aprons
There the smell of espresso
Snaps me to attention
There I see diners
Sitting in street cafés
Sipping red wine

They are lovers in my dreams

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On Broadway

Once more on my journey down Broadway from 107th Street
I make my usual stop in La Embajada Restaurant for that
First shot of coffee that transports me
To Mother’s kitchen in Ponce
The sounds of little Javier’s rooster
Just out back saluting the sun
85-year-old Doña Monce across the yard calling
Looking for mother’s good morning

As I make my way down Broadway
Small hardware stores and delis
Open for business bristle with shoppers
Spanish streams from radios
Streams from hundreds of mouths
Hurrying down the streets
People go about their sacred routines

Down Broadway
In the Silver Moon Bakery
A young French man
Kneads slabs of dough
Transforming them
Into warm inviting loaves

An olive-skinned Dominican girl
Arranges the window
Of Rona’s Dress Shop
As she might arrange
Her living room for guests

Behind the Famous Deli counter
Indian men smile revealing
Impeccably white teeth
Shimmering beyond their bronze skin
How beautiful they are

As I make my way down Broadway
I remember the winter it snowed 36 inches
Remember the man who chose to ski
Down the frozen avenue
En route to his first meal of the day
How I marveled at the sight of New York
Frozen in its morning and knew
I’d never see it this way again

I pass Lincoln Center on my way down Broadway
See Chagall’s masterpieces wave to me
From the Metropolitan Opera House
See Dante Alighieri standing
Amid tree canopies in the sun
See Arnando’s Afro-Cuban band
Playing in the plaza
And dancers swirling round
The gushing fountain
And the wealthy filling
Balconies overhead
Raising their champagne glasses
Surveying the savage dancers below

Across the street I peek
At Lincoln Plaza’s marquee
Read titles of Australian
Italian and Japanese films
Stop myself from going into
The ice cream parlor next door
Where small oval tables made of metal
Are garnished with international ice cream eaters

Miniature art for sale line city sidewalks
A fortuneteller calls out for customers
From her corner there
A book dealer peddles his cherished works here
As crammed buses pull up
To squeeze one more person in for the ride

Going down Broadway
I pass Trump Towers’ mammoth
Silver globe perched in the clouds
Notice teetering cranes stories above
Another skyscraper going up
And below subway nomads surge out
From within their cave at 59th street
I arrive at the mouth
Of Central Park
Where bikers
Runners
Walkers
Lovers coalesce
In an experiment begun long ago
There at the fountain’s feet I sit
There I rest and gaze in awe
Once more on my journey down Broadway

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Riding the Subway

When subway sounds burst
Through my melancholy
I remember the people I love
The songs I sing
The sun popping through
My cracked winters

Remember how
The New York City Ballet performs
As perfect as a caterpillar in motion

Then think
If a bomb hit
The orchestra pit
Would be filled
With ballerinas

Our amazement would mean nothing at all

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In *La Borriqueña Panadería*
In *el Coto Laurel*
The workers speak Spanish
They have that dry Puerto Rican
Sense of humor
They bake bread daily
Make these little ham & cheese sandwiches
On hot dog bread we call *bocadillos*
mouthfuls

In *La Borriqueña*
They have Puerto Rican pastries
*Pastelillos*
*Tembleque*
*Flan*
And the aroma of newly cooked
Rice and beans and chicken

The people of
*La Borriqueña Panadería*
Make me feel
Warm and welcomed

Just like those in *La Rosita*
On Broadway and 108th street
In New York City

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