

Pedro
Pietri

PEDRO PIETRI

Monday Morning

Monday morning
the end of the world returns
Everybody has a hangover
Everybody has lost their temper
All thru the night nobody slept
and now is time to wake up again
and take more instructions
from the instigators of destruction

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The race for the toilet begins
The table is empty
There is plenty of nothing to eat
Black coffee without toast
A few words with the holy ghost
And is time to forget
the definition of time
as you lose your mind
trying to get to work on time
to say good morning
to your well-dressed
clean-cut white-collar executioner
who has never worked a day
in his remote-control existence

Everybody has bad breath this morning
switchblade tempers anti-social eyeballs

cemetery erections wash-and-wear headaches
as downtown trains faint on top of them

Farts of protest
are heard by the wind
as the working
day and night begins
for the tenants
of condom buildings
in el barrio
the south bronx
lower manhattan
fort greene
astoria queens
and wherever else
we are concentrated
castrated and liquidated
in the name of democracy
that raped our nation
with deadly weapons
and dumped us into
the garment district
and other places
Unemployed faces
drop dead working
for spice ham
and cheese salaries
and the next
legal paid holiday

Everybody hates their jobs
Everybody hates their take-home pay
Everybody hates new york state taxes
Everybody is praying for better days
Everybody is waiting for the messiah
the same one who left after he got elected
Everybody must work until they have saved
enough money for a good down payment
on a semi-decent credit card funeral

EVERYBODY HATES THEM

EVERYBODY HATES THEM

Spic take the broom
and sweep the place
till you make it look
cleaner than heaven
Spic take the mop
and baptize the floor
with soap and water
Spic the garbage can
looks like your salary
make it look like
my salary immediately
Spic I feel hungry
run faster than the speed
of light and get me
a tailored made sandwich
Spic skip your lunch today
for coming late yesterday
Spic I is feeling bored
amuse me with your
broken english humor
Spic the floor is sinning
again do your thing
with the salvation broom
Spic the windows are blind
restore their vision
Spic you have five minutes
to make ten deliveries
Spic stick your tongue out
I want to mail a letter

Spic say goodnight
to your employer he is
exhausted from looking
at you work so hard

Day is done
The night that never comes is over
Sober or not is time to wake up again
The alarm clock is alive and well

EVERYBODY HATES THEM

and ringing at six o'clock in the morning
Wake up chico! snap out of that dream
If you get to work one minute late
you will be deducted for fifteen

FREDDIE PRINZE

"Looking Good"

COMEDY PERFORMANCE AT MR. KELLY'S IN
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS (CBS RECORDS, 1974)

I'm not all Puerto Rican.

I'm half Hungarian; HungaRican.

That was a weird combination to grow up with because I could never figure out how my parents met. A Gypsy and a Puerto Rican. I asked my mother and she told me that they were on a bus trying to pick each other's pocket.

My mother is great! She was always been a romanticist. She is always talking about her wedding:

"Oh Freddie, my wedding was so beautiful. The flowers. The orchestra playing. Your father looked so handsome—you should have been there."

I was there.

There are not many Puerto Ricans where I live now. I live in Los Angeles. There's about 200,000 Puerto Ricans—in one room.

But it's better than the neighborhood I grew up in. I grew up in New York City in an area called Washington Heights, which was like a ghetto suburb.

Slums with trees. Even the birds were junkies.

Dope addict sparrows that didn't know how to fly. Just fall out of trees and bother people:

"Tweet! tweet! sucka, gimme a quarter."

A lot of people think that Puerto Ricans are responsible for cock roaches. I want to clear that up right now! We didn't bring them here. When we got here they were living in the apartments we live in now.

But they're strong. I'm afraid of them. They adapt to any environment. They learned how to talk in my building.

They would threaten me before I went out:

"Freddie! Where are you going? To the grocery store, huh? Don't come back with no roach poison or we lock you out!"

The guy I talk about most and when I first started I talked about him a lot, was Mr. Rivera, who was the landlord of the apartment building I grew up in.

He was the kind of landlord that never wanted to fix anything in your apartment, but he wanted the key anyway.

In case of an emergency, like he was broke.

You couldn't complain to him.

My father would tell him:

"Hey! Rivera! There's no ceiling in our apartment!"

"That's okay, the guy upstairs don't walk around much! He don't complain he don't have a floor! You just like to make trouble, Mr. Prinze!"

"Never mind that—when are you going to fix it?"

"It's not my job, man!"

Other things that gives people the wrong impression of Puerto Ricans are movies. Like *West Side Story* set us back a hundred years—and we were only in the country twenty!

Because if you saw the movie it made people think that all we did was stand in streets whistling and dancing.

They thought we were gay ballet dancers!

And the movie became such a hit that the New York Chamber of Commerce had to keep up the image about Puerto Ricans in New York. So they hired Gene Kelly and Fred Astaire to choreograph every Puerto Rican wino in Harlem.

This was for the bus tours from the Midwest that would come in, see Harlem and tour the city.

And the wins are on the corner going:

"Hey man, if that bus don't show up by four-thirty I ain't dancing for nobody!"

PEDRO PIETRI

Puerto Rican Obituary

They worked

They were always on time

They were never late

They never spoke back

when they were insulted

They worked

They never took days off

that were not on the calendar

They never went on strike

without permission

They worked

ten days a week

and were only paid for five

They worked

They worked

They worked

and they died

They died broke

They died owing

They died never knowing

what the front entrance

of the first national city bank looks like

Juan

Miguel

Milagros

Olga

Manuel

All died yesterday today
 and will die again tomorrow
 passing their bill collectors
 on to the next of kin
 All died
 waiting for the garden of eden
 to open up again
 under a new management
 All died
 dreaming about america
 waking them up in the middle of the night
 screaming: Mira Mira
 your name is on the winning lottery ticket
 for one hundred thousand dollars
 All died
 hating the grocery stores
 that sold them make-believe steak
 and bullet-proof rice and beans
 All died waiting dreaming and hating

Dead Puerto Ricans

Who never knew they were Puerto Ricans
 Who never took a coffee break
 from the ten commandments
 to KILL KILL KILL
 the landlords of their cracked skulls
 and communicate with their latino souls

Juan

Miguel

Milagros

Olga

Manuel

From the nervous breakdown streets
 where the mice live like millionaires

and the people do not live at all
 are dead and were never alive

Juan

died waiting for his number to hit
 Miguel

died waiting for the welfare check
 to come and go and come again
 Milagros

died waiting for her ten children

to grow up and work

so she could quit working

Olga

died waiting for a five dollar raise

Manuel

died waiting for his supervisor to drop dead
 so he could get a promotion

Is a long ride

from Spanish Harlem

to long island cemetery

where they were buried

First the train

and then the bus

and the cold cuts for lunch

and the flowers

that will be stolen

when visiting hours are over

Is very expensive

Is very expensive

But they understand

Their parents understood

Is a long non-profit ride

from Spanish Harlem

to long island cemetery

Juan

Miguel

Milagros

Olga

Manuel

All died yesterday today
and will die again tomorrow

Dreaming

Dreaming about queens

Clean-cut lily-white neighborhood

Puerto Ricanless scene

Thirty-thousand-dollar home

The first spics on the block

Proud to belong to a community

of gringos who want them lynched

Proud to be a long distance away

from the sacred phrase: Que Pasa

These dreams

These empty dreams

from the make-believe bedrooms

their parents left them

are the after-effects

of television programs

about the ideal

white american family

with black maids

and latino janitors

who are well train

to make everyone

and their bill collectors

laugh at them

and the people they represent

Juan

died dreaming about a new car

Miguel

died dreaming about new anti-poverty programs

Milagros

died dreaming about a trip to Puerto Rico

Olga

died dreaming about real jewelry

Manuel

died dreaming about the irish sweepstakes

They all died

like a hero sandwich dies

in the garment district

at twelve o'clock in the afternoon

social security number to ashes

union dues to dust

They knew

they were born to weep

and keep the morticians employed

as long as they pledge allegiance

to the flag that wants them destroyed

They saw their names listed

in the telephone directory of destruction

They were train to turn

the other cheek by newspapers

that misspelled mispronounced

and misunderstood their names

and celebrated when death came

and stole their final laundry ticket

They were born dead

and they died dead

Is time *

to visit sister lopez again

the number one healer

and fortune card dealer

in Spanish Harlem

She can communicate

with your late relatives

for a reasonable fee

Good news is guaranteed

Rise Table Rise Table
 death is not dumb and disable
 Those who love you want to know
 the correct number to play
 Let them know this right away
 Rise Table Rise Table
 death is not dumb and disable
 Now that your problems are over
 and the world is off your shoulders
 help those who you left behind
 find financial peace of mind
 Rise Table Rise Table
 death is not dumb and disable
 If the right number we hit
 all our problems will split
 and we will visit your grave
 on every legal holiday
 Those who love you want to know
 the correct number to play
 Let them know this right away
 We know your spirit is able
 Death is not dumb and disable
 RISE TABLE RISE TABLE

Juan
 Miguel
 Milagros
 Olga
 Manuel
 All died yesterday today
 and will die again tomorrow
 Hating fighting and stealing
 broken windows from each other
 Practicing a religion without a roof
 The old testament
 The new testament
 according to the gospel
 of the internal revenue

the judge and jury and executioner
 protector and eternal bill collector
 Secondhand shit for sale
 Learn how to say Como Esta Usted
 and you will make a fortune
 They are dead
 They are dead
 and will not return from the dead
 until they stop neglecting
 the art of their dialogue
 for broken english lessons
 to impress the mister goldsteins
 who keep them employed
 as lavaplatos porters messenger boys
 factory workers maids stock clerks
 shipping clerks assistant mailroom
 assistant, assistant assistant
 to the assistant's assistant
 assistant lavaplatos and automatic
 artificial smiling doormen
 for the lowest wages of the ages
 and rages when you demand a raise
 because is against the company policy
 to promote SPICS SPICS SPICS

Juan
 died hating Miguel because Miguel's
 used car was in better running condition
 than his used car
 Miguel
 died hating Milagros because Milagros
 had a color television set
 and he could not afford one yet
 Milagros
 died hating Olga because Olga
 made five dollars more on the same job
 Olga

died hating Manuel because Manuel
had hit the numbers more times
than she had hit the numbers
Manuel
died hating all of them
Juan
Miguel
Milagros
and Olga
because they all spoke broken english
more fluently than he did

And now they are together
in the main lobby of the void
Addicted to silence
Off limits to the wind
Confine to worm supremacy
in long island cemetery
This is the groovy hereafter
the protestant collection box
was talking so loud and proud about

Here lies Juan
Here lies Miguel
Here lies Milagros
Here lies Olga
Here lies Manuel
who died yesterday today
and will die again tomorrow
Always broke
Always owing
Never knowing
that they are beautiful people
Never knowing
the geography of their complexion

PUERTO RICO IS A BEAUTIFUL PLACE
PUERTORRIQUENOS ARE A BEAUTIFUL RACE

If only they
had turned off the television
and tune into their own imaginations
If only they
had used the white supremacy bibles
for toilet paper purpose
and make their latino souls
the only religion of their race
If only they
had return to the definition of the sun
after the first mental snowstorm
on the summer of their senses
If only they
had kept their eyes open
at the funeral of their fellow employees
who came to this country to make a fortune
and were buried without underwears

Juan
Miguel
Milagros
Olga
Manuel
will right now be doing their own thing
where beautiful people sing
and dance and work together
where the wind is a stranger
to miserable weather conditions
where you do not need a dictionary
to communicate with your people
Aqui Se Habla Espanol all the time
Aqui you salute your flag first
Aqui there are no dial soap commercials
Aqui everybody smells good
Aqui tv dinners do not have a future
Aqui the men and women admire desire
and never get tired of each other
Aqui. Que Pasa Power is what's happening

Aqui to be called negrito means to be called LOVE

PIRI THOMAS

The Konk

When I was a kid, many folks spent a lot of time, effort, and money trying to pass for white. Very few homes did not have some kind of skin-bleaching cream. If poverty prevented its purchase, raw lemon juice would suffice. Cream or juice was liberally applied to the skin with the hope of turning it yellow, which was light, if not white.

Parents were constantly pinching the noses of their children so that flat, wide nostrils could be unnaturally forced into sculptured images of white folks' noses.

Running neck and neck were hair-straightening and coloring effects. The very poor made up batches of Vaseline, lye, and harsh brown octagon soap for their hair-straightening. For those who could afford it, there were jars of heavy white cream with "You too can have beautiful hair" advertised on the label.

Even more money could buy a marcel, which straightened curly hair by pressing it out with iron-hot combs after dipping one's head in oil. The smell of burnt hair often overpowered the odors of garbage-littered alleyways. Even comic books carried ads for beauty care. One could earn a Red Ryder B.B. rifle or a bicycle if one sold enough of a particular brand of lightening cream.

By the time I was fourteen, I had grown tired of my curly hair being called "nappy," *pasas* (raisins), or *pelo malo* (bad hair). One day I decided to take the plunge. I went to a barbershop way up in the wilds of the South Bronx, recommended by some walking exponents of one hair-straightening process known as the "konk."

At Prospect Avenue station, I made my exit and headed for the bar-

bershop, located on Westchester Avenue. A huge sign in the window advertised its specialty.

ROY'S BARBERSHOP—HAIR STRAIGHTENED
KONKS—FIVE DOLLARS—SATISFACTION
GUARANTEED

Overcoming my hesitancy, I marched into that barbershop like I copped konks every day. On the walls were photographs of all kinds of celebrities, including fighters like Kid Gavilan and Ray Robinson. They flashed big smiles signifying their joy at sporting straight hair via konks or marcel.

Some sad blues were being wailed by Billie Holiday from an antique radio. I figured Billie was saying konking was all right too. Two young black men wearing white barbershop jackets were playing checkers. One of them looked at me with a smile and in singsong asked, "What will it be, li'l brother? A trim nip or the works?"

"Gimme a konk," I said, as if I'd invented the word.

"Sit right there, li'l brother." He pointed to a mid-Victorian barber-shop chair. "We'll get you straightened out in no time at all."

With cool-breeze apprehension, I lightly eased myself into the chair, which in my vivid imagination resembled the hot seat at Sing Sing.

"I'm Roy, bro. What's yours?"

"Mine's Piri," I answered, my eyes glued to his own natural unprocessed hair.

Roy put on some rubber gloves like doctors use when they have to touch something they don't really want to.

"Umhh." He frowned. "This won't do . . . won't do at all."

I wondered if my Puerto Rican hair was going to be left out of konk too. "What's the matter?"

"Too much grease, son. You got grease on your head that's been there from the year one. Gotta give you an A-1 Shampoo first, okay? It's \$2.50 extra."

Too deeply involved by now to say no, I agreed and Roy proceeded to do his art. After the final rinsing, he squeaked my hair between his thumb and forefinger. "It's clean now."

I had to admit my curly hair had not looked that clean in a long time. Seeing my reflection in the mirror, I grunted approval.