

Thanksgiving By Carmen, Age 10
By Nancy Mann

Thanksgiving feasts are coming, Oregon to Mississippi,
Across a great nation;
But I belong to a certain class,
With traditions of a lower station.

Under golden arches, by seats shiny, bright plastic red
Throngs – plaid-shirted workers
Line up to buy, (not invited), to be fed...

Schoolchildren now recognize importance of Indians, praise Pilgrims
But migrants born in poverty, contemporary victims...

When fast-food worker hands me a receipt, I'm guaranteed
On limp, salted French fries I will feed...
So many have piled out of the trucks
On America's Mother's breast (dry?) to suck...

I carefully hoarded— hand over rolled-up money –
(If in KFC, I'd rush to the counter
To grab some packets of honey).
Those lucky to have gloves, they'll un-peel.
Youths shivering from cold (too soon are they old!)
Their cheeks give off no rosy glow...
Fingers uncurl, some under buns remove pickles –
Uncoordinated claws, cold digits – icicles.

Miles before rest-stops, my legs I held tight
Squeezed them to hold "it" with all my might –
No dreams of steaming sweet potato or yam
Can't say well, in English, how tired I am...
Niños and niñas, children stair-stepped –
Cold water in restroom sink their holiday prep.
We're proud, pesticide-coated, the leaf-dust from the beans –
And people whisper..."They're not very clean...!"

Reversing our quilted, grubby jackets,
Cram cookies in pockets, if given them...no manners...no decorum...
Given day-old salad, through plastic wrapper – with spoons – we'll attack it.

Youths elsewhere anticipate all the dessert you could want –
And, savory stuffing – for me? That vision?
I guess I'll watch it on TV – who am I bluffing?

If the place gives away moldy, left-over corn –
I must run, to the first truck – tell the others –
“Free! Comida! Lean on the horn!”
If servers offer up soft pumpkin pie,
“Andale!” I rush it to the abuelas – they are weak – some may die!
They are wet – through some broken truck windows came rain –
Some have traumatic arthritis – are in pain;
Shawl-wrapped, hunched, toothless –
They possess wisdom; they are not useless...
They labored until into old age –
But preserved canciones, our stories as sages...

(I kept my puppy-mix of many breeds and some Airedale) –
Señor Gomez threw him out, near Ft. Lauderdale...
Said, “You'll eat the scraps you gathered in his pail!”
I said, “Abuela, have you hidden dinero? For another?
And, can I have boots – you promised – if we get to Miami?”
“Pobrecita,” she says now, only, “Miami?”
Says my abuela, “We'll see...We'll see...”

Mi hermana keeps holding on to her dream –
A rosy, pink cocina – a refrigerator – full of mocha ice cream!
And so many clothes, new-to wear to school...
I am growing so fast – not growing up to be a fool –
I hope for money “under the table,” mis hermanos
Getting jobs – that they'll be able – to clean Florida pools.

Please consider, reflect, how would you feel?
If you dragged yourself in from the road –
Too tired to eat, yet starved.
Everywhere else, Thanksgiving turkeys are carved—
Mostly, our holiday is rushed, crowded, not from snow well-brushed –
Barely affordable, small...Happy Meal?