

"One Today"

by Richard Blanco

One sun rose on us today, kindled over our shores,  
peeking over the Smokies, greeting the faces  
of the Great Lakes, spreading a simple truth  
across the Great Plains, then charging across the Rockies.  
One light, waking up rooftops, under each one, a story  
told by our silent gestures moving behind windows.

My face, your face, millions of faces in morning's mirrors,  
each one yawning to life, crescendoing into our day:  
pencil-yellow school buses, the rhythm of traffic lights,  
fruit stands: apples, limes, and oranges arrayed like rainbows  
begging our praise. Silver trucks heavy with oil or paper—  
bricks or milk, teeming over highways alongside us,  
on our way to clean tables, read ledgers, or save lives—  
to teach geometry, or ring-up groceries as my mother did  
for twenty years, so I could write this poem.

All of us as vital as the one light we move through,  
the same light on blackboards with lessons for the day:  
equations to solve, history to question, or atoms imagined,  
the "I have a dream" we keep dreaming,  
or the impossible vocabulary of sorrow that won't explain  
the empty desks of twenty children marked absent  
today, and forever. Many prayers, but one light  
breathing color into stained glass windows,  
life into the faces of bronze statues, warmth  
onto the steps of our museums and park benches  
as mothers watch children slide into the day.

One ground. Our ground, rooting us to every stalk  
of corn, every head of wheat sown by sweat  
and hands, hands gleaning coal or planting windmills  
in deserts and hilltops that keep us warm, hands  
digging trenches, routing pipes and cables, hands  
as worn as my father's cutting sugarcane  
so my brother and I could have books and shoes.

The dust of farms and deserts, cities and plains  
mingled by one wind—our breath. Breathe. Hear it  
through the day's gorgeous din of honking cabs,  
buses launching down avenues, the symphony  
of footsteps, guitars, and screeching subways,  
the unexpected song bird on your clothes line.

Hear: squeaky playground swings, trains whistling,  
or whispers across café tables, Hear: the doors we open  
for each other all day, saying: hello, shalom,  
buon giorno, howdy, namaste, or buenos días  
in the language my mother taught me—in every language  
spoken into one wind carrying our lives  
without prejudice, as these words break from my lips.

One sky: since the Appalachians and Sierras claimed  
their majesty, and the Mississippi and Colorado worked  
their way to the sea. Thank the work of our hands:  
weaving steel into bridges, finishing one more report  
for the boss on time, stitching another wound  
or uniform, the first brush stroke on a portrait,  
or the last floor on the Freedom Tower  
jutting into a sky that yields to our resilience.

One sky, toward which we sometimes lift our eyes  
tired from work: some days guessing at the weather  
of our lives, some days giving thanks for a love  
that loves you back, sometimes praising a mother  
who knew how to give, or forgiving a father  
who couldn't give what you wanted.

We head home: through the gloss of rain or weight  
of snow, or the plum blush of dusk, but always—home,  
always under one sky, our sky. And always one moon  
like a silent drum tapping on every rooftop  
and every window, of one country—all of us—  
facing the stars  
hope—a new constellation  
waiting for us to map it,  
waiting for us to name it—together.