

# 21<sup>st</sup> Century Friend

*Ray Gonzalez*

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First, let's not get carried away. Mercy is rare and the defeated run in circles, insisting their day will come. The standard marker is always a tree, blind with emotion and leaves, their caring shade expecting us to play out our fantasies among the branches.

Second, the mind says one thing, but the bow and arrow are encased in glass, expecting history to dance. Let's pass out flags, carry buckets of water, and protect our children from alien diseases because we found UFOs in our back pockets.

Let's insist the cell phone will ring and bring hope because the justice in its tone will change the theory of the Apostles and their miraculous greed, Jesus still waiting to unplug his phone charger from the wall.

His way out is lined with bricks, manifestos, and the unraveling demon splashed on the walls, yet we can't stop and stare at the meaning of this. Things will come to pass in our fresh and violent century, so let us see how resistance is revelation and those are moments we are going to grab with fists.

# The Cross

*Ray Gonzalez*

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Most days, I don't think about it or see it. Sometimes, I notice the Christ on the wall and the dark wood of the crucifix, perhaps the cross that crossed a moment of faith years ago, but is now an image that fades in and out of my life. Most years, I pray to things I don't know I am praying to, though I could examine them and find the twisted stick figure I pulled out of the river, or a broken seashell, perhaps the skeleton of a lizard that turned to dust in my dreams, even the rosary whose red beads were pressed from rose petals in Spain and given to me by my grandmother before she died, the sweet aroma of death trapped inside the tiny white box it came in.

Is there anything wrong with moving silently toward those things without seeing the cross in front of me, that symbol, the hanging and its sacrifice that hung from every room in every house where I grew up? Most hours, the shape gets closer and I can't admit that the things we were told to believe in as children are the things that will meet us at the gate. Our beliefs were chosen for us.

The cross is the marker for choices that were made in our baptized name. The cross and the unknown that becomes a mystery because, wanting it or not, it has become a part of us. Someone dying with his feet hanging off the ground supposedly showed us it is acceptable to be lifted off the earth. Ascension and the cross. Ascension and the symbol of +.

What does this mean? Will confession and forced communion solve everything? Most days, I accept the fact I carry the Catholic seed that won't leave my brain, though I don't want to believe it. The cross may not help me find out why. It may only make me wonder how young I was on the day I swallowed it completely and the cross formed the crossroads in my throat that lead in two directions and allow me, on some days, to stand at the black intersection and look both ways.

# Available for an Epiphany

*Ray Gonzalez*

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The longest word used by Shakespeare in any of his works is honorificabilitudinitatibus. It doesn't mean the lone black hair that sticks out of your big right toe just below the toenail. The word for that hair is slypadorelystybold. Pregnant goldfish are called twits, but my father used to call me a dummy, a goof-ball like those stinking moth balls in closets that held his four pair of golf shoes whose spikes dug into the closet carpet, a detail I remember because my slarapin is alive. In other words, my second heart—that one that resides inside my soul and beats for the past and is able to put these things together. Graffito is the little-used singular of the much used plural word graffiti, but manes is not the plural for more than one moon because to mistake mane for moon would mean I could not rise in the middle of the night, suffering from insomnia, and write something about a moon I have not seen in months, my words glowing on my computer screen brighter than the graffito I dreamed about when a friend of one of my nephews was gunned down in a drive-by. Narcissism is the psychiatric term for self-love as in the lone artist compelled to ignore his masterpiece leaning on the canvas because the cracked mirror in his tiny apartment is showing him many stark visions he conjures through powerful fumes rising out of the dozens of tubes of oil paints that are squashed all over the floor.

A language becomes extinct in this world every two weeks. A silence fills the halls every three months, its source a secret, its ability to slow the development of rapture a potent thing that is best avoided from dusk to dawn, though one vital moment appears on the border of light and darkness as if something is about to touch those of us who have even the slightest clue as to what is going on. In 1961, Italian artist Piero Manzoni packed his feces in cans, signed and mounted them, and then sold them as art. This story about the natural elements of man is a common one, an epic no artist or writer is able to comprehend because the canned stuff is the purest form of artistic expression. The fact it is imprisoned in a container is a metaphor about imaginative souls who create anything in order to get from here to there without having to step on too much shit or having to face what their mighty and private visions are truly made of. Old story, open the can.

In 1983, a Japanese artist, Tadahiko Ogawa, made a copy of the Mona Lisa completely out of ordinary toast. There was a football player for the New York Giants with the nickname "Toast" because he was burned all the time for touchdowns. So, what? Toast. Crossing one's fingers is a way of secretly making the sign of the Cross. It was started by early Christians to ask for divine assistance without attracting the attention of pagans. Crossing the toes is a way of secretly making sure you are still alive, the rare ability to actually cross your toes saying more than I can possibly say. A baby octopus is about the size of a flea when it is born. I once saw a flea the size of an octopus, but it was dead. A slug has four noses. My memories have one nose. 62 degrees Fahrenheit is the minimum temperature required for a grasshopper to be able to hop. I have a brass statue of a grasshopper in my office, but it doesn't do me any good

because the wise man called me once and said “Grasshopper” and the awful world showed up, instead. Fine-grained volcanic ash can be found as an ingredient in some toothpaste. So can blood. Some asteroids have other asteroids orbiting them. Some hemorrhoids have other hemorrhoids orbiting them. Devoid of its cells and proteins, human blood has the same general makeup as sea water. I prefer the river.

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