

Underground

When my wife boarded the subway
to Manhattan this morning, she smuggled
four centuries beneath the worn overcoat

she inherited from her mother: the coat
her mom clutched on a Greyhound bus
from Tampa to Talladega. The one she

laid across her seat at a rest stop midday
on a sweltering Tuesday in August,
throat parched and palms glazed in sweat,

as she asked for the bathroom key. She
clamped her painted nails as the cashier
refused to offer her a word, instead

pointed to the *White Only* sign and
motioned toward a dung-filled field
where she was forced to squat as

a busload of tourists watched her slide
her drawers to her ankles, trembling
to keep her balance, trying to spare her

church shoes and her grace. There is
a child, four generations from now,
who will remember a story he's never

been told, see himself in a frayed book
about Jim Crow, discover a dung-filled
field behind an overgrown rest stop and

remember a woman he's never met alive
on the wall of his grandmother's foyer:
bloodshot eyes that refuse to look away.

Carlos Andrés Gómez

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