

Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal

Volume 3 | Issue 2

Article 5

January 2004

The Gift

Margarita Engle

Follow this and additional works at: <https://orb.binghamton.edu/harpurpalate>

Recommended Citation

Engle, Margarita (2004) "The Gift," *Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal*: Vol. 3: Iss. 2, Article 5.
Available at: <https://orb.binghamton.edu/harpurpalate/vol3/iss2/5>

This Fiction is brought to you for free and open access by The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). It has been accepted for inclusion in Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal by an authorized editor of The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). For more information, please contact ORB@binghamton.edu.

The Gift

Margarita Engle

I assumed it would be the perfect gift, worthy of an exile's nostalgia. So when I traveled to Cuba to visit relatives, I brought back a pair of vials containing the island, one filled with blood-red clay from a sugarcane field, the other with finely beveled crystals of sugary-white beach sand. My grandmother wasn't pleased. She took my gifts of soil and sand, set them on a table, and glared at them as she reminisced with dismay. "*Ay, esta tierra roja, esta tierra maldita*, this red dirt, this cursed dirt, how I hated it, *mira*, look, it's the same color as the devil's forked tail, I grew up with this evil red mud stuck to my feet, and then, when they sent me to the fields to do forced labor..."

My grandma looked up and noticed me standing there. By then, we both knew I'd chosen the worst possible gift. "The sand," she added mercifully, "is pretty." I was never one to enjoy toasting my skin in the hot sun on a beach, but every year there was a season when the whole family went to the shore. I always sat in the shade, on a blanket, because I didn't like getting sand in my clothes. But we were together, that was something, always a big picnic, everyone swimming or eating, the children playing games. "*Gracias*," she finally said. "Thank you. This is a strange gift, very original, but thank you."

"*De nada*," I replied, "it was nothing." Nothing to her. Everything to me. From that moment on, I became the one with an incurable nostalgia. We'd traded places. I spent my days dreaming of red soil and white sand. She spent hers giving thanks for paved streets and a roof to shelter her from the sun.