

["My Father in English" by Richard Blanco](#)

First half of his life lived in Spanish: the long syntax of *las montañas* that lined his village, the rhyme of *sol* with his soul—a Cuban *alma*—that swayed with *las palmas*, the sharp rhythm of his *machete* cutting through *caña*, the syllables of his *canarios* that sung into *la brisa* of the island home he left to spell out the second half of his life in English—the vernacular of New York City sleet, neon, glass—and the brick factory where he learned to polish steel twelve hours a day. Enough to save enough to buy a used Spanish-English dictionary he kept bedside like a bible—studied fifteen new words after his prayers each night, then practiced them on us the next day: *Buenos días, indeed, my family. Indeed más coffee. Have a good day today, indeed*—and again in the evening: *Gracias to my bella wife, indeed, for dinner. Hicistes tu homework, indeed? La vida is indeed difícil.* Indeed did indeed become his favorite word, which, like the rest of his new life, he never quite grasped: overused and misused often to my embarrassment. Yet the word I most learned to love and know him through: *indeed*, the exile who tried to master the language he chose to master him, *indeed*, the husband who refused to say *I love you* in English to my mother, the man who died without true translation. *Indeed*, meaning: in fact/*en efecto*, meaning: in reality/*de hecho*, meaning to say now what I always meant to tell him in both languages: thank you/*gracias* for surrendering the past tense of your life so that I might conjugate myself here in the present of this country, in truth/*así es, indeed.*