

BOMB

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Before I could say bomb I said bomba. Our next door neighbor, an old musician, played the drumbeat of a bomba almost every night after dinner. If I pressed my ear against the wall I could feel it vibrate. I shook my bootie to the Bomba, the Latin music I liked to dance to, even when my mother said, good girls shouldn't move like that. When I said bomba clapping my hands, asking for more bomba, my mother turned up the easy listening radio station. She didn't like the way bomba music got me all excited and unruly.

Que bomba? Our neighbor, a widow lady who only took off her curlers when she was sure to leave the building, came by on Sunday mornings with gossip burning on her lips to tell us the latest, *bomba*, the most unbelievable thing she ever heard. A bomba: juicy information that makes the heart explode.

La Bomba, was *the bomb*, the one that the gringos dropped from jet planes on Dominican Republic when the United States occupied in the early part of the century and then again in 1965. La bomba, something that kept leftist guerillas in check.

»It's the bomb,« my twelve-year-old cousin wrote me in an email to say that Jay Z's new CD, is *the bomb*. »Do you know what that means?« she asked me and translated: Great! Fantastic! Amazing! That was before Columbine and 911, before students all over the United States were asked to carry their books in transparent knapsacks. Now saying the words *bomb*, *revolver*, *gun*, *I'll shoot you*, even while play fighting at school will have you investigated.

Before I knew it was an airplane I thought it was a bomb. It was the day of September 11th. I was awakened with a phone call. »Turn on the TV. There was an explosion.« Without words, the world watched the Twin Towers collapse.

For weeks, we watched the Towers in slow motion, we rewind the images of the explosion on our TIVO. We watched it, pausing on each frame, wondering if the rumors were true, that smaller bombs were placed throughout the Towers. »That's why the towers fell so fast.« The conspiracist proclaimed behind closed doors, where they weren't censored by terrorized editors and producers who wouldn't publish, or even publicly contemplate that maybe there was more to the 911 story than what the politicians fed us.

»Que bomba are you talking about?« My grandmother asked me when I retold the stories that spread like wildfire on the internet. My stories were not like the bombas she shared in the kitchen while making sancocho on Sundays, but were about the bombs that I spoke of in regards to the conspiracies of 911 while we were riding on the subway. »Don't you see the signs,« she warned and pointed to all the signs on the train: »If you see something, say something.« She looked around at the other passengers worried that someone might have overheard me and reminded me that in Dominican Republic they kill trouble makers like me. Americans kill too, I reminded her. Everyday people die, mostly brown people like us die, without making trouble at all. Shhh. She said. Shhh. She said again. And suddenly someone on the train pulled the breaks. The train stopped. I thought about the stories that were born about the bomb on the train that was only spoken aloud from my lips.

After 911 a poet friend of mine moved to Paris. She said that people were too afraid in the States to say anything critical about Bush's »patriot act« and she was going to a city where people could have an intelligent conversation about »terrorism«. She believed that all that business about homeland security made the US feel less like home and more like a prison. She moved into an apartment in Paris and arrived home one day to find that her home was bombed by mistake. They meant to bomb the man who lived below her.

»A bomb,« she said. »All my poems are gone. Everything is gone. It didn't even make the news.«

Did you hear about the Super-atomic bomb? It was big news, in the headlines, front page in the newspaper in Italy. President Bush was asking allies for 100 billion dollars to build a modernized nuclear bomb. Italians wondered what my American friends were saying about the Super-atomic bomb. When I returned to the United States, no one I asked had heard about Bush's plans. Not until weeks later, when the world was already enraged.

When I travel I know not to say the word bomb aloud at an airport. Not when I'm waiting on line, after taking off my shoes and have already placed my laptop on the conveyor belt.

Not if I want to get past security and catch my plane on time.

I have been advised not to carry, borrow from a library or even think reading, a *How to build a bomb*, manual in public. Not even out of curiosity. Not to write the word in a diary, or jot down bomb making desires, especially when I am in a public space, where someone will see and report me. Even if I plan to write the most brilliant novel about bombs, I have to make sure to watch my back.

The more paranoid side of me contemplates erasing my internet history when I searched for bomb making information. There were hundreds, maybe thousands of provocative links filled with statements and questions written by terrified people who say, »I want to blow things up«. And other people who told them how to make bombs with household materials.

During the cold war with Russia, I was still in elementary school and I was taught to hide under the desk when the bell at school went off. Every month we performed a drill just in case there was a bomb, an atomic bomb. Back then the bomb was the beginning of the end of the world.

A Bomb, it's a bomb, the bomb, a word that sounds like an end. A soft word. When you speak it, your lips come together and all goes quiet. As if it is begging for Peace.



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