

Tina tripped on a rock and fell. The Red dotted the soil, mirrored in the Sky. Like a river of blood, pink and dilute, the Juice became sticky in her hand. Embarrassment is difficult to escape but inevitable for those who March. Travel upon a burdened path, flattened by circuits, rough with tracks, and one will find the circumference. She feels the barrier. It's porous and soft. Permeable to some. Those who know that Hope is in the seeds. In all the little places. She doesn't know much of great things. And she doesn't really want to be remembered. She only wishes to not feel ashamed. To have a Color she can wear of her own. One that adds to the rainbow, not one that blends. If there is a beyond, past the circumference, past the dark light in her palm, then it will come. It always does and always will.

She stands there in the field alone, with the care of her tahtli and nantli. With the coziness of a battle fought within almost over. The beams shine on her head, warming her scalp. The Host feels good, pliable, and universal. This one is her own, shared with countless others. A pebble on a beach. Without talking, she can now say that she is whole, at least in part for now. With the courage to Be without being told. To speak in an alien language to alien people in a familiar land. To simply be her, strawberries and all. Tina got up off the ground and pulled out the smashed fruit from her pocket. She put one in her mouth and then went to go to tell her sister about the Crows.

~

Tina felt embarrassed to eat the tortillas her father had given her. And she felt embarrassed by her father because he couldn't talk like those Anglos on the new televisions in the windows at the United Department Store. But she did love her father because he gave her tortillas every day and she never went a day without a full belly.

Like many days when she was not at school or at church or at Muchenberger's playing basketball with her older brothers, she went across the river to pick strawberries. The owners of the field paid the pickers with money, but there were so many strawberries that they usually didn't notice if a few were missing. Her pockets were still pink from the last time.

It was late spring, but warm. A humid warm typical of these parts which made her jeans stick to her thighs. This year the rains came to flood the river, though her house was once again spared. Her sister Tess sat next to her in the back of the old '35 Chevy pickup truck and counted clouds as they sped by. For each bump in the dusty road, she jumped a little to protect her rear, but it became sore anyway. The truck bed smelled like onions and muck and an unpleasantly scented man sat on a crate toward the back. She could see his lunchbox, but there were no tortillas by the looks of it. Tina hid her tortillas and didn't know if the man did the same. The wind gave her a whiff of what was buried in her pocket. Her mouth started to water, and her face turned white.

Hernán looked at the brown of his palm and wondered. The river was clear, with flakes of ice littered on the surface. He thought of his grandmother. She once told him a story about how she came to America. Crossing another river in a different, far away land. She told him about her father. About how he was killed during the Revolution. She told him about the mountains she crossed and the snow that almost took her. She told him about how beautiful that snow was.

Hernán watched as the little Bird flew over the river. Soon it reached the horizon and was gone from his sight, but not gone forever. He wondered if he had the courage of his grandmother to cross his own river and see the purple peaks beyond.

Hernán looked around the bank until he found a handful of little flat stones. The first skipped two times and then fell beneath the torrent. The second, three times. The third made it all the way across. Hernán looked at the brown of his palm and smiled.

~

I don't remember much about the day I spent at Elitch Gardens except for what is recorded on the little home video tapes we keep in the cupboard. My dad doesn't remember much either.

There are flashes of color and blurs of sound. There's a little girl in my mother's lap in a bumper car and our next-door neighbor is in the car next to us. My dad must have been the one recording, but I have no recollection of this.

The teacups always made me sick, and I can hear my mom's patient voice: "Aoife, you don't have to ride them if you don't want to". And then another more alien voice says, "I'll be fine, I promise". I don't know who the little girl in the video is. She looks like me and I remember the overalls she's wearing, but she is as foreign to me as Becky Sharp. My Dad and I drove by the old Elitch's last week. There are apartments there now. The Carousel is no longer in use and the theater is in even worse shape. I asked my dad what it was like. He told me that it was magical and painful to think about now. I don't know if I will ever watch these videos again and I don't know if I would want to.

~

He walks home with a wink. As brave and bombastic as Beowulf, armed with his wooden sword. A monster waits in his lair sixty feet six inches away, staring down the gladiator, primed to strike. The monster hurls leather towards home with the rage of a dragon and he swings with a smack against hickory. A hanger flies on into the brush and he is safe for another round. The monster winds up again and a curl of light passes by safely and without notice. A third time, the monster yells without words, a roar heard all the way to Racine. He gives in response a single finger pointed to the sky as if to call his shot. This show of bravery is now legend, unafraid of the beasts and barons of the land, remembered forever, but he is no hero. The monster shoots toward him for a final time, the swordsman's thanes go silent, and they watch his great knock soar over the ivy in the distance. Cheers ring behind the hills, ecstasy washes over the world and he passes around the monster with a jubilant return home. Victorious.

~