

Abuelita Rosa Dreams of Men in Olive

Una vez lo soñé... unos hombres de vestido olivo lo tenían a él. Y se traspasaba... por eso yo digo que el sufrió para morir, porque saber que castigo les daban. Cuando vivíamos en Santa Marta, yo soñé que se traspasaba las paredes. Se entraba allí con nosotros, por las paredes se traspasaba. Yo dije, Hay Dios... Y soñaba que lo tenían unos hombres de vestido olivo a él, y entonces hablaba conmigo y decía, "No tenga pena, Mamá, no tenga pena. Que no le de pena." Entonces ya nos pasamos a otra casa. Como a los once días me busco, seguro estaba ya entregando su alma. Se me presento. Lo que me dijo se me olvidó. Iba bien peinado, bien trajeado, su traje precioso, sus zapatos brillaban. Hasta estrellitas echaban sus zapatos. Entonces yo lo quería abrasar y se hizo para atrás. Y se fue, se fue yendo. Se desapareció.

Yo le conté a una Hermana... Ella dijo, "Dios le enseñó el sueño para que sepa que Jesús se lo llevo."

5 Tías and 5 Tíos

My family tree is bigger than the other kids' because it is wide with 5 tías and 5 tíos, including the one Mamá doesn't talk about. He was very handsome and loved The Beatles. The girls loved him and he protected her from bad men. He would tell his friends, "Somos cuates, pero cuidadito con mi hermana." They all respected him.

So when I made the family tree for school I drew a thick brown trunk to hold everyone up together, with the Ramirezes on one side and the Chavezes on the other. But real close to each other. And my hermanas and me all the way at the bottom. Not like in real life, with my hermanas and tíos in Guatemala and us over here.

I drew lots and lots of limbs. I cut out pictures of everyone's faces, and pressed them flat on the green paper strips Mamá glued on for leaves. Until I was left with one empty space. "Falta la foto de mi tío." I opened the album like a crocodile's mouth and realized I'd never seen what he looks like. "Desapareció," she said.

When Mamá Told Me

I didn't understand how someone could just be somewhere and then poof away. I thought it was like when the earth opened up her mouth and swallowed bad people in the Bible, including the kids. Mamá would tell me when I was disobedient, and hit me lightly with a wooden spoon, and say how good I have it because I wasn't born in that time. Arnaldo must've disappeared like that.

Or maybe it was like when I felt so small I wanted to disappear. Like when Ms. H asked me what Mamá does for a living and I told her I didn't know. She looked down at me through her brown oval glasses, blinking her little eyes, and said, "Well, don't you want to know what your mom does?" She waited a million and two years for a reply, and all I felt was the river running up inside, pressing behind my eye balls, because I didn't want to say, "My mom cleans houses, *big* houses, not like the one-bedroom we share, where Papi was *this* close to being hurt by the cholos. She scrubs bathrooms and toilets on her knees, like a holy prayer, not like the other moms that stay home." I wanted to tell her I love Mamá, and I felt ashamed for feeling ashamed, but didn't say nothing because it was too late.