

An Excerpt from My Senior Thesis

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An Excerpt from My Senior Thesis

By Aimee Carrazco

Hunger Got the Best of Me—
For My Grandpa, Jesus

The white pick-up truck seemed to grow as it drew near. I sat atop a bale of hay, my stomach beginning to turn with both hunger and anticipation. Señor Howard stepped down off of the truck and took a slow look around. He let his eyes observe mi hermano Luis for some time, and finally allowed them to rest on me.

“Hola muchachos,” he told us in his broken and almost incoherent Spanish.

“Hola Señor Howard,” we responded with a nod.

“How is the cosecha looking?” he asked, “are we on schedule for the harvest?”

A second nod from us indicated some understanding of the question. We followed his movement towards the truck and hopped in; Luis in the backseat and I in the passenger’s seat. As the truck made its way around the fields, Señor Howard mumbled something we did not understand. We pointed towards our work and lifted our thumbs to communicate steady progress.

After reaching the barbed wired fence that marked the end of his property, Señor Howard turned the truck around and sped back towards our rest area. We stepped down, and from his window Señor Howard tossed us each a small packet of tortillas. This would sustain us until we saw him in the coming days.

The white pick-up truck made the turn onto the causeway and disappeared. We found a windless space under the causeway and built a small fire from twigs and other shrubbery.

One day passed, and the tortillas truly tasted great after being heated over the fire. Two more days passed and the tortillas began to stale. On the sixth day I tossed my tortillas away, enough mold told me that Señor Howard would likely soon be back with more.

Señor Howard did not show up that day, or the next.

My hunger got the best of me and I made the shameful walk back to the trashcan to pull out the molded tortillas. I tore off as much of the decay as possible and brought it close to the fire. My callused hands did not flinch away from the heat. My chapped lips felt new cracks splitting open as I savored the food I was about to eat. My face burned from proximity to the flames. My eyes burned from the warmth, the humiliation, and the fear.

Tomorrow would be a better day, it had to.

Lo siento Ama—
For My Mom, Alicia

I screamed in pure agony, my five year old body had never felt physical, blistering pain like this before.

I hadn't meant to pull the pot off of the stovetop, it was an accident. Ama had gotten home late at night, maybe eight o'clock. We were all starving but we wouldn't complain. She didn't need it. I was just so anxious to see if the oatmeal on the stove was ready to eat. I couldn't wait much longer, and had seen Ama check on it several times before. She had stepped away from it for too long, I would check on it myself, I decided.

I stretched as tall as I could, making it to the agonizing end of my tip toes. As soon as I grabbed onto the handle I felt my feet give out. The scorching hot oatmeal covered my face and arms. The pain was unbearable. Ama rushed into the kitchen when she heard my scream, and muttered incoherent Spanish. She lifted my limp body unto the countertop and poured cold water all over me for several minutes. It still burned badly, but all that spilled out of my mouth were apologies. "Lo siento Ama, I'm sorry, I didn't want to spill," tears rolled down my face. "I'm sorry, so sorry."

"¿Mijita, estas bien?" Ama began to cry with me. I didn't understand. Had I hurt her feelings? I knew she was hungry too.

"I'm so sorry that we live this way. It hurts my heart to see you all hungry," Ama was apologizing to me. I stared back in disbelief. "Tu Papa will be home soon, I will have him go buy some tortillas. It will be okay."

For the next couple of hours I rested lifelessly on a hammock. Ama had coated my red skin with sábila, the gooey stuff inside an Aloe Vera plant. She was sure it was magic. From the hammock I heard the muffled echo of my parents' conversation. "No podemos quedarnos aquí. We must go to El Norte," implored Ama. Papa answered her with silence. He had been thinking the same thing for a long time now. Maybe it was actually happening. Maybe my parents were ready to take us north. I had heard so many stories about it, it seemed like a fantasy, and I never actually thought any of it was real.

Tia Carmen had gone before. She said it was incredible. There was so much work and so much food! She said they had tortillas with every meal. I had relentlessly dreamt about it. In that moment, my hopes began to rise and a smile crept onto my face as I imagined a table full of food and all of my family circled around it, praying and laughing. Oh, what a dream.