

Bowling Alley Love

One of my cousins, the one who gawks but never observes, is a real escandalosa. She says that there was a year sometime in the late seventies when my mom didn't call home.

Later tonight I'll have to massage my mother's back. It burns as she folds over into her leather bag, digging deep, sifting through documents untangling cobwebs from another lifetime.

She turns sixty-five in three months time. I signed her up for medicare today. I can tell when she's found something of importance, her face softens under the weight of my questioning stare, and the small distance between us grows.

I can find her in another time, a time where my freckled brother and I do not exist if not in between sandpaper cat licks and the sharp echo of empty beer cans.

From the yard I watch her sway a little stiff, a little loose.

Tonight I do my best to guard her from my excitement as she unearths her husband's corpse, small and delicate. She holds him in her palm, liberating his freckled sober profile from an unmarked envelope, tucked away a negative waits to be developed.

How often does she think of him?

I hesitate before begging her to let me have him, to let me hold him, to let me keep him. I want to press him into my cheek, and weave his long black eyelashes through my own. He would look nice in my wallet where I could cart him around everywhere I go, getting lost on the freeway, making up for lost time. But someone else has already taken that spot. Instead I'll lean him against my college diploma, he'll look handsome peering down at me. He is a handsome man, a handsome corpse.

My cousin, la escandalosa says there was year sometime in the late

seventies when my mother didn't call home. A year when my grandmother's hair grew long with worries, a blinding curtain of silver down the length of her spine.

My mother didn't call; it's true, because she was busy. Busy falling in love. In love. Love.

It's hard being so curious, I want to know more. Does it hurt her that I love him too? I want to know how he wooed her. I want to know how he won her. I want to know how he loved her. I want to know how he lost her. Her llanto rarely suspends my reality.

There was a year sometime in the late seventies when nobody knew the whereabouts of my mother. She was busy, falling in love and falling down a dark weeping staircase where she broke her ankle in three parts. She did not call home to Guatemala. Instead she followed my father to Denver.

Together they danced to Marvin Gaye's "Let's Get It On." In a bowling alley, the janitor's night shift, they danced. They danced, her foot in a cast, his greasy mechanic hands holding her up, they danced. They slow danced. Along the glowing lanes they swayed, sinking, drowning in love, they danced. Drawing each other in, her breasts swelling against his chest, his neck softened by her lips, they danced as addiction pulled him away.

Today, she winces in cold weather. The three screws that hold her bones together burn, carving his name into her marrow. When all that's left are his long eyelashes stitched into my own and his freckles, a painting on my brother's pale skin.

My cousin is a real escandalosa and the late seventies are gone.