

Cultural Daily

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Scents Engraved on My Life

Sarah Ochoa Rodriguez · Tuesday, April 9th, 2024

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by Sarah Ochoa Rodriguez

Mami,

The remainder of our family is trapped in Mexico while we are stranded on an abandoned island of mispronounced words, eyes on us, and “I’d like to speak to someone in English.” My challenging stutters must be too hard to understand as my native tongue tries to manipulate my words. Could be that we’re the same amount of forward for inquiring the same question on the phone. “Could I speak to someone in Spanish?” This question is recited every time I enter through medical doors and I’m enveloped with smells of sterilized instruments, hand sanitizer, and frigid air conditioning.

We go to the doctor for a check and we ask the same question each time. You faltered and hid from your broken English that survived through immigration. They were looking for any word you stammered upon as they pecked and stared. How did you not see it? You came with Papi when he got work here in the States, western words and unfamiliar tastes hounded your senses so fast.

Mi Familia, My Family. A family of sheep, a family of rabbits hiding from the winter snow. We stayed safe in the abode of mi abuela, my grandmother. I remember my grandmother took the house and made it into her restaurant. She cooks, cleans, and makes all the smells from the kitchen travel through the whole house filling each room. The scent filled every sweater in the closet, even the sheets on the bed with the aroma of home. Of belonging.

My cousins and I used to gather on the couch to play an old card game, the dogs would jump onto the blanket-covered couch. They licked my face with their dirty tongue smelling like kibble. We would do fashion shows in the living room. And eat until we pass out. The smells are still plastered on the walls, the memories as well.

One distinct scent that I’ve kept treasured through it all was your aroma, Mami, which fights the current in which it seeps through. Winter candy apple. I smelled it on the pillow I cried to sleep on, etching my nose till I couldn’t smell anything else besides red apples, winter rose petals, candied oranges, maple leaves, and fresh cinnamon. These smells are imprinted on my nose. My lungs inhale, widening my rib cage to take in the smells that have captured my heart since I was born. They still stagger behind me as the worn-out engraved holes at the bottom of my childhood shoes

are simply a fragment of who I once was.

I'm surrounded now by the comforting smell of my muddy Converse which has seen all the places I've walked, run, and fallen. All these smells etched into my olfactory bulb, will remain there as the years pass. I want only to remember the memory as though it weren't my own but someone else's tale of life. As such, I no longer recite the smells as though they were my very own hands I was describing, for if I do they will become what I hoped I had forgotten.

(Featured image by Larissa Farber)

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