

Las Manos

I'll never forget the scent that perfumed Abuelita's hands
Palmolive dish soap with a hint of Cloro
Scrubbing everything from countertops to toilets and showers
Wringing mops to clean up spills of children that were not always her own
Holding onto her faded rosary from several mornings and evenings spent
Praying for the forgiveness of the heavy pecados of the whole world.

Abuelito's hands were heavy.

Thick and calloused from the years he spent working in the labor
picking anything from cotton in Tejas to strawberries in "Meechigan."

When Abuelita asks him to bring in nopales from the yard
so she can make some nopalitos con frijolitos for dinner, he'd go out and pick them
with his bare manos, unable to feel the needles of the nopal pierce his worn russet skin.

These were the manos that raised and fed me,
the manos that helped feed a nation who acknowledged their existence with
words and phrases like "wetback" or "be.....aner" and "Speak English,
you're in America," with signs on restaurant windows and gasolineras that read
"No dogs or Mexicans allowed."

A nation who worked them to exhaustion, treating them
as a commodity to be exploited. Viewed as cheap, hired extra hands
Estas manos worked tirelessly so my hands could hold a pencil and write
"important" things," so my back could carry a backpack filled with libros
and a head full of sueños so that I could be seen as worth more than just my hands
so that I could be seen as a person. So eventually these manos, my manos,
would have the opportunity to hold a diploma with my name on it.

Maybe my hands have never known the sting that comes from repeatedly
sticking my hands in Cloro or the developed layers of protection needed in order
to be numb to the world around me unwilling to acknowledge my humanity.

Pero when I look at my hands,

I see all the pain and the sacrificio it took for them to look that way.

~ Karina Varela