

Carolina Castoreno

Recuerdos

Recuerdos means memories in Spanish, and in this context refers to the items placed on the altar of loved ones who have passed for Dia de Los Muertos, the Day of the Dead.

Concord grapes fresh off the vine.
Well, not really,
store bought from the overpriced
supermarket on 86th street. I never knew
they were called Concords.
I called them *Wela's* grapes,
but they still burst with the same sour
explosion as my tongue effortlessly
splits the velvety purple peel.
I hated all other grapes that didn't
taste like *Wela's* tart little spheres.

A dented tin of Royal Dansk
butter cookies,
no *galletas* inside of course.
I'd rush to pry off the lid only to
find it stuffed to the brim
with buttons, needles, and thimbles-
both rubber and metal
and spools of every colored-thread.
The fibers of all my Virgin Mary robes
for every nativity play
and Dia de Guadalupe.

A cup of cream and sugar with a splash
of coffee.

Another *café* black and bitter
both spiced with sprigs of cinnamon.
I used to take it sweet like hers
the *leche* coating my chocolate *concha*
toasted beige, like my chubby fingers.
Now I drink it dark and strong like his.
Long ago swallowing my hope
and tolerance for humanity.
Roasted cynicism, stoic brew.

A red bandana with black and white paisleys,
twisted tear drops
infusing the room with the aroma of baby oil
and Vicks vapor rub, the miracle drug,
partnered with *manzanilla* tea and
eggs for *ojo*, a couple *sana sana*'s and
you could cure cancer. *Wélo* kept it
tucked in the pocket of his khakis or
sometimes his flannel shirt, always the *cholo*,
even at 76, even when the diabetes took
his legs, *siempre cabrón!*

Carolina Castoreno - *Recuerdos*

All the *recuerdos de mis abuelos* nestled on the lap of
a Mexican blanket.

Not a big San Marcos *Colcha*, a little woolen
rainbow-colored *serape* we used to drape
over *Welo's* chair, the kind gringos call "throws."

A fat cobalt blue candle that smells like
the beach replacing *veladoras de los santos*.

Sorry *Wela*, the *Virgencita* doesn't
visit my house much these days.

I burn the sage and wonder, why
can't all grapes taste like *Wela's*?