"The Neighborhood is Changing" and Other Poems

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Llorona

She comes in the night and takes
the children who don’t listen to their parents
you can hear her crying, “¡Ay mis hijos!”

They left at night.
Alma on her mother’s back
Jose on his father’s
half gallon of brown water between them.
“We’ll have a house with a yard, big and green.
The kids will go to a good school, amor,
we’re almost there.”
Father whispers to mother.
Time slugs along,
as mother retells the story of the weeping woman
and tries not to fall over.

They arrived at noon.
Alma and Jose asleep
on their parents laps
inside the back of the bubbling semi.
Groups huddled together,
women, men, and children
waiting for the knock that tells them they’re clear.

101 degrees.
Throat peeling, gasping for air
the need to stay quiet drowns instinct.
cry for help.
Father’s eyes close
as he sees Alma and Jose
playing on the green yard.
His last breath a ghost,
bound to the air.
Mother sits, holding her children.
Mute tears slither down her face.

Ay, mis hijos
Immigrant

The dusty, purple, worn-out recliner
sits in front of the large window,
my father’s spot.
My worn father.
With creases in his forehead and
frown marks on the corners of his mouth
from years of worrying.
Wrinkles on the edge of his eyes
from laughing a little too much at his own jokes.
He sits on his dusty, purple, worn-out recliner
And retells the same story of his childhood
Of him never leaving his house without his slingshot,
his pockets overflowing with rocks
as he made his way through the village and shot anything that moved.
Now, sitting on bones that crack in an unfamiliar way,
with muscles that ache
as if he’s spent the past ten hours lifting weights
and hurt a little more every day.
Not the strong man he used to be,
he says.
The neighborhood is changing

There stands a twelve-foot concrete wall along the side of Highway 214 where once stood a plain wire fence.

For the third time today
el Posole speed walks while bobbing his head headphones in his ears, waving.

The unfamiliar faces outnumber the familiar.
groups of teenagers making their way from school laughing and shoving each other all the way down the street.
They walk comfortably past the old crack house—sold and re-built,
a white picket fence replaces the bare, patchy grass once enveloped in dog shit.

A new family sits on the old man’s yard
where his grandson, a stranger, held a garage sale
sold his white rocking chair
and bright blue bike with the brown basket sitting on handlebars.
He took his dogs.

The cat lady walks around the block
calling out, by name, the neighborhood strays
as always greeted by the neighbors averting eyes and fake smiles.
The animal control van creeps its way down the opposite end of the streets.
The cat lady comes to visit and asks if we’ve seen her cats,
“Two more have gone missing,” she says “they never miss dinner”

Grandma and grandpa spend their time alone
The bare driveway a dead giveaway,
where once sat three cars
now sits emptiness.

The neighborhood is changing.