

Limonada

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The last time I made lemonade was when my great-grandpa was alive
His face weathered with experience and lessons traced through
His veins of life as an American
Held all models of pride in his clear, wise expression

He wanted to know how I was doing, why I was making lemonade
What was I adding
I told him I was adding a bit of both. Lemons and strawberries
Little bit of ice because summers in L.A. were scorching

And him just saying, that's good, was enough for me to know
just making lemonade I was making him proud

And then he left me to do the rest of the work

I've never confronted my imposter until my great-grandpa passed away
Because then it was easier to confront in his empty room
Showing me where I couldn't show up for myself in school
Like how I couldn't show up for him in his years of relishing in his
accomplishments of his American Dream
The rest of us had proved our worth, but I hadn't
Not yet, not while dredging through storms of imposter syndrome
And feelings of anxiety from his loss
So strange rays of emotions from grief took me away

Buried me somewhere in seeds of shame
Too dry to root from the cemented dirt
After being shoveled into a grueling experience of
First generation problems

First generation problems
Taste like champagne problems to others who know

Where their language comes from in their vocals
Where their pride is shown in family photos
With photos published on school platforms of people so proud
to rep what they had

Sinking their teeth through the juicy flesh of the fruits from their labor
Something bountiful, baskets of things first-gen students shy away from
From people who knew their worth in themselves
Who share their experiences without a breath taken away

While I sit here, us first gens on our own benches
Winded by everything that twists us inside
that makes us feel less of our flesh and bones
And more of the mirage I promised in applications
Until the dusts of euphoria settle into the dark corners I recede into
Now your eyes no longer see what being in college meant to me

Because we hear our insecurities about of validity
Was this the American Dream my family dreamt for me?
Do I have dreams for me?
Or do these dreams of imposters in my mirrors mean
I have to shrink away
From the place I always thought was where I was meant to be?

Do I bring my roots from home and lay them here?
Do I speak in my own tongue to share other folds
waiting to be unveiled about the beauty in our world's diversity?
Do I share with others my struggles to find strength in unity
So we can make the world better tomorrow in our numbers
with empathy?

Do I-?

Is a question that hangs where a first gen once sat
In their class learning Statistics
Before they submitted "Withdrawal," on their Monday schedule

While other students like me fantasized a transcript in our heads

“I can’t do this anymore, Mom.”

“I can take a gap year and get right back to it.”

“I can’t go back, I’m not good enough to learn with those other people.”

I-

All the Is I ever said hung like a chain of fungi around my roots
That didn’t spring into the open space
above the dirt while rings of insecurities rang through my ears
With rings of every reason why I wanted to quit
And burn everything off and walk away
To uproot myself and be placed as weeds on the headstone with my great-
grandpa’s photo
And take comfort with his memory, let these dreams shrivel in peace.

But grandpa told me I was good

And every time I would see myself as my own imposter
in the reflection of his headstone, he’d be the mirror
of what I wasn’t

I wasn’t an imposter in the house
with the broken Spanish and the outstanding grades
I was his great-granddaughter, the prodigy for our familia
Who spoke broken but more fluent Spanish
with good grades because I chose myself
over these expectations of what made an American Dream

The same way my great-grandpa had done for us
Laid every brick, no matter how crooked or chipped
No matter the persecution by others of what made an American
Because in his eyes, my grandpa was no imposter
He wasn’t bound to regrets of who he became
As he built the home base for us in his new homeland
Because in every scrap of cement

he saw me crafting my own life of beautiful dreams
In every seedling he planted in the pots of his garden
he saw an imposter-less child
Weaving thornless roses through
the earth in seedlings meant for more

So I made my own dream like I made my own pot
Crafted from clay broken in with cracks and dust
From those days I wanted to take it all away
to get rid of these imposter pangs
I churned my own soil from beds of mud and cracked earth
From where my family laid the foundation for us
So we could have as much as the people who didn't look like us

I laid my roots and they drowned in rain
Where my grief from grandpa was suffocating
And those roots laid so low in the soil
Because I wasn't as strong before as I am today
Until I remembered him
When he said what I was doing was good enough
Something as simple as making lemonade was good enough
It would make going through college good enough
although not simple enough
And I remembered that he grew up and grew old
And that was good enough for him
And I remembered he wanted me to grow up and grow old
In the way that was good enough for me

So I grow and I grow until I'm bursting out of my own pot
And I will grow and grow until my stems extend and enclose
Around others who will see everything I want them to see

To see me as a proud woman of color
Who writes with her wit and soul for the world
And shares stories of finding how to make things sweet again
After sucking on sour fruits of poor labor

From wicked droughts of my own self destructing thoughts
Because I'm laying the seeds of who I am meant to be

And I'll reach through these grapevines on the wall
that used to separate me from everyone else in the class
Take these seedlings through their lifespans
until they are ready for reincarnation
As fruits of my labor
I'll make my stems thrush into branches of victories
So they'll knot in thick ropes of the security in my identity
And lay them over as a canopy
For these seeds to root through their shells

For when they blossom, they hang heavy as ripe lemons
And we'll catch them when they drop onto the grass
Because when life gives you lemons, you make lemonade