

**Too Brown, Too Worn, Too Much**

by Jaime Rodríguez

They said abs came from the gym,  
we got ours clipping onions,  
I came home, rocking knees to chest,  
palms torn, calloused, smelling of earth.

They tanned in the magazines,  
we baked all day in the fields,  
slapped tanning oil onto my skin,  
body toasted, blistered, stinging.

They flashed teeth straight as fence posts,  
we hid ours—crooked, cracked,  
caught staring too long at the wrong boys,  
backs wet, bent, carrying their own scars.

They wore long hair feathered like movie stars,  
we got ours shaved under mesquite trees,  
cousins dragging clippers across my scalp,  
bare for fieldwork, not dreams or fame.

They promised a place if we stayed in line,  
we scrubbed raw, swallowed our words,  
I carried a body not built for their dream,  
too brown, too worn, too much.

## **Never in Words**

I love the way you waited for me to click before we moved,  
I love the way you sat there, lights off, waiting till I made it inside,  
I love the way you slipped me your last five after the baile, for my lonche,  
I love the way you handed me the pink concha, knowing it was my favorite,  
I love the way you fixed my plate first, stacking it with the last of the tamales,  
I love the way you squeezed my shoulder quick, backing out the driveway,  
I love the way your hand held mine during prayer, tighter than anyone would notice,  
I love the way you kicked your boots off, left 'em for me without a word,  
I love the way you always took the street side, keeping me from danger,  
I love the way you gave me your St. Christopher chain before I hit the road,  
I love the way you stayed quiet when the world got loud,  
I love the way you stayed parked, headlights off, long after I left,  
I love the way you almost said it—almost, but not the way I needed.  
Not the way I wanted.