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FROM THE EARTH

by

Michelle Aguiar

Where did you come from?

No de la tierra. Not from the dirt. My mother told me that. I have a father, but . . . do you remember your third grade teacher? Because it's kind of like that for me. The further I get from that time, the more the reality of my father becomes a question, like maybe I *did* come from the earth, like a weed nobody planted, sprouting from the sun-stricken, drought-soaked earth. Out of nowhere I grew, and maybe it was my father who tried to pull me out from his newlywed garden built on his PhDs in child psychology and research on misdiagnosed autism. Maybe as I grew, I choked the chances he had with my mother, or the love he had for my sister, and no matter how hard or how often he tore me limb from limb from the ground, my toes remained rooted deep within the soil and grew again into new legs, arms, hands, fingers, body, and head, my living mind flashing neuron signals like lightning in the sky, striking at his intelligence and stopping his mind.

Whoever I ask the answer is always the same—your father just broke one day.

For twenty years I felt the push and pull of his persistent voice beating against my ears, *vete niña* go away girl, *no soy tu papa* I am not your father, *no me toques* don't touch me. Over and over his words were relentless, like a red infection boiling through the marrow of my bones.

Until one day, while he was sitting with his eyes closed, I saw his red eyes on the inside of my lids like some vision from hell. Crying. He was crying for his lost wife and daughter because of an ugly weed that decided to grow.

Maybe *I* was the thorn in my father's side, folded beneath his skin, and when he stretched in front of the mirror every morning of his life, my finger pushed and poked from the inside, and every day he rubbed it and pushed it back in with a wince and a hiss until it was my whole hand, all five digits, touching his, that he forced away, and when my eyes could finally be seen from the transparent stretched skin under his ribcage, my mother's questions couldn't be answered. He would throw his hands up and yell at her to shut up about something that didn't exist. Those eyes, that hand, and that finger weren't—couldn't—be real, and they weren't his, and it was all my mother's fault for bringing them up. The nights would get later and the screams would get louder until the suitcase I've heard so much about was my father's only answer. Maybe that's why he started watching pornography. Maybe he tried to cut himself open, body and spirit, and stuff himself with strangers' bodies to forget my mother, my sister, me. Because maybe when that sperm and egg met twenty years ago he didn't want to know that I decided not to stay in my mother, but in him, and to this day I'm still there stretching between his entrails, wrapping around his

