BIRTHWITNESS

Ofelia Zepeda

My mother gave birth to me in an old wooden row house in the cotton fields of Arizona. She remembers it was windy.

She knew it was March as she gave birth.

The tin roof rattled, a piece uplifted around one in the afternoon. She remembers it was windy in the cotton field. She also used to say I was baptized standing up.

"It doesn't count," the woman behind the glass window tells me, "if you were not baptized the same year you were born," Ofelia Zepeda, mother of the witness, tells me.

"If you were not baptized the same year you were born, if you were not baptized the same year you were born, the baptismal certificate cannot be used to verify your birth."
"You need affidavits," she said. It is useful for speeches and incantations. "Your elders siblings, you have some, don't you? That pulls sickness from the minds and bodies of believers. They have to be old enough to have a memory. It is a language useful for pulling memory from the depths of the earth. When I really want to tell her is when I speak a language much too civilized for writing. I don't bother to explain my parents are illiterate in the English language."

Announcement of your birth:

"Where were they recorded?"

"Did your parents have a family Bible, you know?"

"Are there doctor's records from when you were a baby?"

"You need records," she said. "They do not know of affidavits, they simply know."

They are silent witnesses.

The pollen of spring was floating and sensed me being born.

The wind was there.

The stars were there.

Who knew then that I needed witnesses of my birth? Took in those dirty particles from the cotton fields. Where were there when I breathed my first breath?

"I can imagine my father assisting her with her babies."

"Was it my father?"

"Was it my sister?"

"Who was there with my mother?"

"Could they verify for you?"

"They have to be old enough to have a memory."

"Your elders siblings, you have some, don't you?"

"You need affidavits," she said.

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