

Latino Voices

General Editor

Ilan Stavans

Editorial Board

Francisco Goldman

Achy Obejas

Judith Ortíz-Cofer

Johnny Payne

ZIGZAGGER

Manuel Muñoz



LATINO
VOICES

Northwestern University Press
Evanston, Illinois

CONTENTS

xi Acknowledgments

ANCHORED

5 Zigzagger
20 The Third Myth
31 *Tiburón*
33 Museo de Bellas Artes
36 The Unimportant Lila Parr
47 Swallow

NO BLOOD

51 Campo
61 The Wooden Boat
67 Loco
75 By the Time You Get There,
by the Time You Get Back
83 Anchorage
91 *Astilla*

WAITING TO BE DANGEROUS

95 Not Nevada
101 *Fotito*
105 Waiting to Be Dangerous
111 *Zapatos*
115 Good as Yesterday
121 Everything the White Boy Told You

THE HARBOR OF HANDS

125 Hombre
131 Skyshot
135 *Teatro Japonés*
143 Monkey, *Sí*
147 Clima

Tiburón

The man who sells shark teeth has made it to our town finally. We've been hearing about him for some time now and it was through the south side of town that he decided to come, pushing his wooden wheelbarrow in front of him, the necklaces. If you'd been here yesterday or the day before that (any day but today, before you got used to the town scent), you would have said apricot, something fruity, the heaviness of sawdust, of cherry wood. You would not have said salt, or cannery oil hanging heavy, seagull feathers. You would have known that waiting for this man was going to take a long time, because we're far away from waves. This is a town to wonder in, about that man and why he's bringing shark teeth, all the way out here.

Chela tells us that cows have the same kind of teeth. That the necklaces are from their open mouths, the cows having dehydrated in the foothills this past summer and the farmers thought it too difficult to get to their hillside carcasses, in the yellow grass and the rattlesnakes. She has seen this man picking at the rotting heads of the cows, that he carried pliers and a little saw. His wooden wheelbarrow at the side of the road and him shouting at the birds to get away.

He comes now, down our street, without bells or horns like the men selling snow cones from their three-wheeled bicycles. We came

out because we've been waiting and thought we could hear the clatter of the necklaces against each other, all the way down the street, though they're not hanging but coiled one on top of the other. In a little brown cloth sack held in the palm of his hand, he accepts our dimes and quarters and then, around each of us, he ties a tooth. Each on a brown leathery string that, after he's gone, will leave our necks stained with a sticky oil. No, you can't have two, he tells us, just one, and it's not a toy. And to show us, he takes a face, the left cheek in his old hand, and with his other hand he traces an X on the right cheek with the sharp tip of tooth. The lines begin, but do not bleed, do not break.

"No es juguete, niños," he tells us again.

We don't believe Chela anymore, but we do listen to Pancha, and she says she knows why the man comes. Because he is like the spiders that we step on, the daddy longlegs that crawl down from the corners of our houses, that you must throw them out after you hear them pop. If not, their little babies come in the middle of the night to slip up your nose, in your mouth and ears to lay more eggs and turn your body into a web.

And this tooth?

This tooth is simple—we can't take it off now. We must search for it in the morning when we open our eyes, and if it isn't there, then we know it has gathered with the other teeth around the neck of a child who doesn't wear one. It has gathered with its brothers and sisters to ring tight and push through a sleeping neck till the skin breaks. We're glad that the man came today, because we've been hearing too much about him in the school yard, the boys kicking dust and saying that it isn't true, but they are like us and stay awake at night. In the dark, awake, even if brothers are there and snoring.

And even now, the dust-kicking boys do the same we do. They cannot sleep. They hold their shark tooth between their fingers and poke themselves with it if their eyes shut, won't let it leave now that they have it. Never wanted it to come in the first place.

NO BLOOD



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

We can see them, from a distance, as a group of friends. We know that a group of friends walking together to the one bar in town cannot line up side by side as they do on television. They must walk in pairs or threes, sometimes ones. From a distance, we can see them as just a group of friends, but if we got closer, if we let the adjectives take on their clothes (black pants, loose blue jeans, shiny shoes, shirts spread across impossible backs) or scents in the air (cigarettes because some of them get nervous, the mingle of three colognes, one like lemons), we would find that the group is a mangle of hesitations. We can see two of them trying to walk on either side of Tomás, that Nestor is alone and trying to keep up.