

Original pieces by Lidia Ortiz

On Being a Great-Tía y Señora

Preface:

My tía cries at the very mention of her favorite niece's name. She becomes so overwhelmed with the love and joy she feels for her that it bursts out of her uncontrollably. There is no stopping her once we get her started. I will confess that it always amused my cousins and me when we were younger. And we teased her lovingly for her blatant favoritism and her decadent romanticism of her little "baby" niece. Especially since the niece is now a woman in her 40s. Still, it always made for fun moments and a chance to fall over laughing at our family gatherings.

Now in my late forties, having been a mom, a tía/great-tía, godmother/comadre/sister by choice, and once upon a time stepmom, I finally understand my tía. And now, I too cry, more privately though, with the same unabashed emotion when I think about the children that I dearly love.

And so here I am, a gray haired señora, in the throes of journeying through the art of acceptance, finally and formally apologizing to my beautiful forever curly, raven haired tía, for failing to understand the power of tía love in my younger days. It was not until I witnessed "my" many children's achievements and misfortunes that I was able to grasp the enormity that is tía love. And so, I say, gracias mi tía, for shamelessly showing us that it is a beautiful thing to love out loud, crazily, even if no one else understands us in the moment. It inspired so much more than we can ever account and thank you for.

The Little Star

The little girl has the blood of the matriarchs coursing through her heart. Her little veins branch out the same as the rivers in which her ancestors hunted in, fished in, and beat clothing against rocks in. Her tiny fingers too touched the angry currents that in their youth, her great-great tía and her great-grandmother, cowered in, tamed, and finally miraculously crossed.

The very idea of a future child such as this little girl gave way to the strength required so the two sisters could hold on, so impossibly long, and in defiance of the physically impossible. They were connected only and barely through the touch of their fingertips and fought the river for their lives, for each other, and for the future that was to be. Dreams of a better life were devised by the tiniest ligaments and bones of their fingers. These very tender tips helped them cling to each other. Until finally, in a moment of inexplicable mercy, the current granted them their lives and they were not swept away by her rage. The sisters exhaustedly clawed their way onto the riverbanks that had once belonged to their ancestors and stood to their feet. They began to walk together, towards their future, following the distant laughter of the children that would someday give these harshest moments meaning. As they walked through the elements, the impossibilities dried away from their drenched bodies and were rarely spoken of again.

Decades later, the family watches the little girl in awe as she fearlessly jumps and runs with the other little ones. They watch her with wonder since they can sense she carries an old wisdom within. She asks many enlightened questions as if she is there to remind the world around her that even as they age, curiosity is a right and an obligation.

“Why are there so many Mexican people here?” she asks her mom. It is the first visit in her short-lived memory that she has spent with her extended family. The unexpected disruption and chaos of the pandemic is finally becoming a blur for her. The adults in her family overhear the question and softly chuckle. They are of the new generation and now understand not to shame the little one for her wondering about these things out loud. The family only observes and leaves it to her mother to explain. Her mother reminds her that she is Mexican too and that this is her other family. The little girl instantly accepts what she is told and proceeds to enjoy some watermelon. She plays with her siblings outside, occasionally pausing to observe her many young cousins and her older relatives. There are so many of them and so she closes her eyes to take in the moment as if it is an energy she is choosing to collect.

Taking a break, the little girl with the easy smile, whose eyes glisten and hold old tales both Irish and Mexican, sits by her great-tía on the grass. She asks the tía, “What is bliss?” The tía, realizing the girl is reading the words on her tattoo, smiles in thought. After the small pause, she answers, “I think bliss is when you are so, so happy that you can’t think of anything else but how happy you are.” The girl seems satisfied with the response. She then touches the word *perseverantia* that is tattooed on the tía’s other arm but does not ask about the meaning. It is as if she does not need to ask since she subconsciously knows that perseverance lives in her blood and bones.

The little girl observes the backyard and looks towards her golden-haired cousin, the oldest of the little Valkyrie’s that have chosen to carry *Matehuala* in their soul. “She is so beautiful,” the girl says, smiling and mesmerized, as if bewitched. “Yes, she is. You are beautiful too,” her great-tía quickly reminds. The tía surprises even herself at the promptness of her response and at her unexpected recognition that these are the thoughts that must be said out loud without hesitation. Bit by bit the tía, in the forty-eight years she has lived, has understood that love must be spoken so it can uncontrollably grow within the next generation. This love will then spread and create self-love, so the bloodline will bloom in a new nourishing soil, with the sturdiest of roots, ready to overcome moments of hardship or unexpected isolation.

The little girl smiles and beams undoubtedly knowing that she is beautiful. She hears the sincerity in the older woman’s words. And knows many truths, as children are all knowing from their very first breath. The little girl stands to her feet, finally rested, and runs to jump on the trampoline again. She blissfully remains unaware that the ancestors are watching her, beaming and relieved. The ancestors see her through the eyes of her family, her many tías and tíos. And they smile with a quiet gladness in their hearts that their children will finally have a life that allows for moments of bliss.