

Mark was dreaming. He was dreaming in his trailer that sat in the valley below the entrance of Greenhead Farm. Mark felt the bed move and opened his eyes to Tracy standing over him with her leg cocked up and her black three-inch heel sparkling. She stomped him, stomped Mark right in the gut with her heel. Blood shot up from the hole in his stomach like a hot, steaming geyser. The blood shot so hard that it tore off Tracy's gray sweatshirt, the one with the iron-on Donald Duck across the front and Garfield written up the left sleeve, the one she stole from her mom's boyfriend, John Daniel Rogers. The blood shot up and covered Mark's collection of die-cast John Deere tractors, then shot out the door of his room, turned the corner and shot down the hall to the refrigerator where it opened the door and shot into the pitcher of orange juice and continued to shoot into the orange juice until it ran over frothy and pink. The blood then shot out the window and hit Mark's favorite cow, Toasty Toes, in the eye, making her turn around so that the blood splattered her ass and tail, then it turned the corner of the house, shot across the front yard and blasted a young tow-headed boy who was walking home to eat his mom's crispy fried chicken with green beans covered in hot sauce and drink tropical punch Kool-Aid. The blood then shot up and flew through a swarm of gnats, soaking their bodies and wings, leaving them too heavy to fly so that they fell to the ground, then turned and splashed down in a puddle drowning the half-dead gnats.

Mark's dog, a brown Doberman without his ears pruned so that they hung floppy and cute, trotted over and licked at the puddle and didn't care if there were drowned gnats floating in it.

After washing her heel in the sink and stealing a camouflage t-shirt with the words "Tom Pig's Restaurant" written on the front in hunter orange, Tracy left in a car, probably a gray Toyota.

The scorching summer found Ana at her grandmother's farm, tucked high on the Texan meseta, only miles from where the Rio Grande winds its way across the country. She was just a tiny thing then, not even six years old, and her grandmother wouldn't live past Christmas. Wrapped in her gauzy shawls to keep the cold from her arthritic joints, death would steal her from the meseta, under a mottled blue-black sky, pricked with a thousand stars. But it was summer then, and her grandmother was singing, pressing masa tortillas in her stiff hands and stirring horchata laced with vanilla and cinnamon. Ana's mother was pregnant again, her belly blooming forth with child, and she drank milky, sweet horchata every day so that the babe growing in her womb would be born with the sweetest disposition.

"¡Reúna los pollos!" her mother demanded, pushing her from the kitchen where her grandmother was singing, and out into the fading afternoon on the meseta. Ana stomped across the dusty dirt of the meseta in her bare feet, a sullen frown set across her face, scowling at how peevish her mother had been the whole day. The girl grabbed for a red hen that squawked and clawed and struggled in her arms. She sang to it, the very same song her mother used to sing to her when she was small and squawking and struggling. The hen quieted, trembling against her breast like a heartbeat, its warm feathers tickling her neck.

In the distance, dusk was creeping over the meseta, painting the sun-baked sand an inky purple. A cool breeze kicked up across the wide plateau and she shivered. Her grandmother called to her in her warm, honey voice, and Ana carefully put the trembling hen into its roost before loping back toward the house. She leapt up the creaking steps and into the warm and embracing womb of her grandmother's kitchen. Her mother's temper had sweetened, and she held out a glass of horchata to Ana and called her "mija" instead of "Ana Luisa," so the girl ventured into the kitchen and sat at her mother's side.

"El bebé está pateando," her mother cooed, taking one of Ana's hands and setting it on her belly. And the little miraculous creature did kick, just a flutter, like a kiss pressed to her palm.

Her grandmother set her gnarled hands on top of Ana's, smudging the backs of her dark fingers with golden, ground masa. "Es un milagro, Ana. Este bebé es un milagro."