

Carlos Reyes

## **My Kitchen Cupboard**

Is lined with withered yellow wallpaper that was once white, but is now filled with oil stains because it's less than five-feet away from the stove. This is where blue cans of Goya Gandules stare at me with contempt. They know that I will never be able to fully replicate my abuela's arroz con gandules, which never fails to stain the plastic containers with an orange oil that never fully washes away no matter how hard I scrub. Red and white cans of La Preferida neighbor them: pinto, black, and refried frijoles complement my many rushed meals of huevos con chorizo because I am a frijolero (but never a beaner). Underneath in the dim light is where glass bottles of Jarritos form a mini-rainbow—right beside the dark brown bottles of Goya Malta and red-white cans of Kola Champagne.

## Abuela Instructs Me on How to Flip Tortillas at Age Nine

We do not use a comal  
or a skillet, instead we  
rest the tortilla directly  
on the oven burner.  
Miniature blue flames  
dance in a circle and  
the tortilla begins to  
puff, as if someone was  
inflating it with air. She  
commands me to flip it  
with my raw hands—  
no tongs allowed telling  
me mira con cuidado mijo.  
As I press the tip of my  
thumb and index finger  
on the tortilla, my finger  
flinches upon contact  
with the blue flame,  
causing a half-cooked  
tortilla to fall on to the  
ground. She tells me no  
te preocupes—that my  
finger tips will get used  
to it. That's when I  
noticed her dried, yellow-  
callused, finger tips  
for the first time.



Carlos J. Reyes is a Mexican-Puerto Rican writer from Chicago, Illinois, who recently earned his M.F.A. in Creative Writing-Poetry from Columbia College Chicago. His writing explores, examines, and interrogates the intersections between Latinx and American culture, immigration, and language. He is a VONA/Voices alum and his most recent work has appeared in *The Acentos Review* and *PALABRITAS*