

HIJAS DE JUÁREZ

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Mausoleo I lived in el D.F. when I first heard this word. I'd get up every morning to go to school, would wait on a seemingly abandoned road for the pesero to slow down enough for me to hop on board. By the time I'd get on, people were already hanging from the back door of the pesero. The inside was crammed with men and women slick and scented with clumps of sleep in their eyes, but all set to start their day. I'd wait for it—the huge arc with a cherub fastened right in the middle to appear before us—as if ascending out of the earth. From the front, the Mausoleo looked like a dull marble wall hanging from the sky from invisible cords. The gray wall was checkered with metal plaques, with names inscribed like cicatrices. This Mausoleo was right in the middle of sparse buildings, vast parched land, and was surrounded by dusty stones. It stood one mile from my apartment, and one mile from el periférico. I would always think, “What an odd place to lay people to rest.”

Los desiertos

Los desiertos de norteamérica no son tan deshabitados como pensamos. El desierto del Mojave, which stretches from southeastern California to Nevada, is rich with Joshua trees, while saguaros speckle the landscape of Arizona—but yucca and lechugilla are not the only things that grow in Chihuahua's desert. El desierto de Chihuahua contiene un mausoleo. It is a lonely mausoleum where tumbleweeds anxiously race across, and cacti stand around like crosses. Strips of different colored cloths, the lace of a dress, the sleeve of a schoolgirl's sweater, and the ribbon that once interlaced a braid, all flap back and forth like bodiless wings in the wind. There are no plaques on this mausoleum, 'cause

there are no walls; there's only a roof of polluted air, endless sky, and a floor made from female remains, chanclas, patent leather shoes y huaraches.

This mausoleum is where precious flowers come to rest—flowers that were yanked from their roots too early and never allowed to bloom. These flowers are undetectable to the naked eye. They don't leave a scented trail when caressed by the wind, but we know they exist because they leave vestiges of their presence knotted in murmured prayers, and in the shape of pink crosses. There are people who've had these flowers in their lives; they woke every morning to see their flowers get bigger, because they nurtured them with love. These people look like you and me; they walk to the mercados, get their hands dirty, and enjoy café de la hoya in pensive sips. But, when you come across such a person “buenas tardes,” while crossing the street, you notice they wear a certain look on their face, as if someone is holding them by their soul. That's the look of someone who had their flower taken in silence, and was left with a void that will resonate forever in their hearts. Many people believe that the mausoleum is watched-over by a guardian that stands atop the mountain. They say the guardian stands tall, with his arms spread, as if ready to catch the disappearing flowers in his arms as they rise to heaven. Many others believe that the guardian is nothing but a mirage—another one of the desert's false promises. After all, what type of guardian would allow the flowers to be taken in the first place? The flower mourners have come together, joining their pain and hope; they use these forces to rake over the desert—turning over every ajo lily, desert zinnia, primrose, poppy, fairy duster, and chuparosa, in search of their flowers.

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In a place called Stevenson Ranch, where a part of the California desert is plagued by the mushrooming of suburbia, a man squatted atop a 400-year-

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old oak. It is a massive oak, thick with age, and its roots lie deep—deeper than any of the pro-expansionists' thoughts could ever go. However, the oak stands inconveniently in the path of a planned highway-widening project. The tree-squatter fixed himself to the tree for ten weeks in support of the tree's life. The tree was spared. For ten years now the precious flowers del desierto de Chihuahua have been disappearing. Over four hundred have been reported missing. Where do we need to squat to stop el lote bravo from expanding?