

THE HEAVENS WEEP FOR US

Thelma Reyna

They close ranks quickly, gray, pregnant banks of clouds not so high above our heads. The wind waves its wispy fingers behind trees, atop hills, in blue valleys and ridges, through crevices and slopes. Creeks puff their little bosoms and prepare to fill. God's little orchestra, syncopated, humming, thrumming, building; building until tears spill.

Black umbrellas clump together, edges wavy with dotted water. Neighbors and brothers and sisters and fathers and mothers melt together in common pain. Both caskets are small, mere plain boxes hobbled together with moans and prayers and whys. Side by side, they could have been children's toy boxes brimming with bears and puppets. But they sit on dirt now, bare pine streaked orange with rivulets of rain.

It's one wound in the earth, just one gape waiting patiently to be filled. One wound smaller than the usual, ashamed to swallow tiny coffins, preferring to be sated with a ripe old soul. But the baby caskets swinging on ropes slowly settle on the bottom, clicking on rocks and dusty stones, the two boxes touching sides, lying together, ready to be tucked in.

Stars fallen.

Moonbeams shamed.

Thunder should have alarmed the town: "Here, here, over here! Hear, hear!"

But the heavens were silent that night.

Silence same as silence old. Silence of the years, of neighbors choosing silence over truth, uncles choosing silence over courage, cousins choosing silence over conflict. Little children of the broken bones, tiny faces of the bloodied lips, slender shoulders with holes burnt in. Little children of the dirt. Little children blued and purpled, reddened and bumpy.

Little silent children in a silent watching village.

Flames licked the moon. Smoke curled into misty darkness too ashamed to swallow it. Wood crackled and heaved and buckled and smothered hope. Two swaddled lumps in the corner, under their mattress, clung together, calling.

Does it matter that their ma was frightened of him? Torn by his knuckles, hands large like iron bellows, frightened of his whiskey breath and wide leather belt? Does it matter that she left?

Does it matter he survived? Clinking glasses at the tavern, readying his hands for her at home, licking lips while flames licked his sons. And their mother not there, not knowing. Fickle moon not telling.

Stars fallen.

Moonbeams shamed.

But the heavens weep today, tears late, tears slow, silence interred.

The heavens weep for us.