


February 2016

The Beauty Within Us

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Recommended Citation

Hernandez, Areli C. (2016) "The Beauty Within Us," *First-Gen Voices: Creative and Critical Narratives on the First-Generation College Experience*: Vol. 5 : Iss. 1 , Article 2.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/fgv/vol5/iss1/2>

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The Hispanic farm workers, coming in from work, bringing in the day's worth, found diversion in Saturday night parties.¹ Tired bodies yearned for a way to express themselves. Their deep tanned skin reflected the long hours that were put into laborious vineyard work, and each premature wrinkle told a story. A deep sigh of relief was let out as they each got to the doorstep. Yesterday they were nothing, but today they transformed into joyful butterflies finally emerging out of their restrictive cocoons. Their grinning faces were not caused by a lavish event. Instead, each evening get-together consisted of savory foods, catchy rhythmic cumbias, and family, and those who were so close they were considered family.

And the sweet, welcoming aroma of freshly brewed hot chocolate filled the air, and the rich, buttery empanadas were placed on the small table. One by one, the people took their hot drinks and bread and sat down. Dressed in cheap outfits, they always looked nice. There they were, huddled into whatever space was available, the moon rising, the food cooking, and the people dancing. One by one, they bit into the strawberry filled turnovers, saving the soft centers for last, for the pastry's middle would melt into their tongues, awakening each of their taste buds with the familiar flavors. They talked. They talked about how fast the children were growing up. How it was just yesterday that they themselves were children. And when Juan grabbed his guitar and delicately strummed each chord with his callused fingers, a silence descended on the party. The people hushed. And as the moon shone through the window, they knew it was time.

Soon, they started to sing along to the songs that their parents had sung along to. To the songs that their grandparents had sung along to. And to each and every one of them, the song was everything as they sang their sorrows, anger, and joy. Each voice only contributed to the addicting melody. And the moon rose. Juan's eyes were now closed as he sang each line with more and more passion. Passion that had been building up inside, now seeping from every one of his pores. Small crystal beads of sweat formed on his forehead and they gracefully glided down the sides of his face, through his shaven beard. And his glowing presence was vital to the people.

And then, there were the songs that got everyone up on their feet. Clapping, forming an ongoing rhythm. And the moonlight seemed to illuminate the tiny home as it bustled with excitement and laughter. Now even I am laughing. The unyielding problems that I had brought with me now disappear as I start singing a childhood tune. Our voices are nowhere near perfect, but together, and I wouldn't trade them for anything. Who says we are useless? Who dares say we are good for nothings? That man behind the guitar is the wisest man that I know. All these people have saved each other by contributing to one more night

¹ This piece is inspired by Chapter 23 from John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*

of joy. Now the moon is high up in the sky, and it is the same moon that the rest of the world knows. The same moon that the poor, Wal-Mart CEO's know almost nothing about. The same moon that the people from our native country see each night before going to sleep. It is our moon. Our beautiful moon. I gaze at it in complete awe. And everything is so beautiful, even me.