

In Exchange for My Absence

By Cynthia Guardado

Abuelo holds the end of a broom halfway bent
over the pila, tries to scrub clean places in the walls
he can no longer reach. I climb into the water-basin,
in the pila's dark corners hides an algae-eating fish,
in order to begin I must catch it. With a bucket I make waves
in shallow water, search for what is tucked away from sight.
Abuelo says, *Me siento solo*. His days lonely, long
like the movie marathons he watches on TV.
The fish circles in a bowl; already, I know I won't visit
again tomorrow, know I don't love him anymore—
the magic of childhood gone like his clamorous
laugh, murky like the chaparro he still drinks. Abuelo
stares at the faucet. He tells me to guard the fish,
says if it hears water running from the tap it will jump.
Its gills will be defenseless on the empty basin's
concrete floor, its fins will shudder in air.

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