

POETRY | FALL 2022

## Even the Ground Is Moving

By Tess Langan

I show up at the client's home  
in broad daylight.  
This was a mistake.  
The sun pounds the left side of my face.  
Squinty-eyed, I take in my surroundings:  
a trailer,  
endless open skies, nowhere to hide  
from the heat,  
a coating of dust,  
the kind of *suelo* that kicks up when  
you walk across it.  
Even the ground is moving.  
My colleague arrived first.  
He has prepared the goods:  
a McDonald's #1,  
a McFlurry,  
Secreted away in the Mickey D's bag  
Waiting  
Two *loroco* pupusas *para mi*  
He has erected a foldable table,  
covered it with a tasteful-if-beige tablecloth,  
unfolded his chair  
from a tiny, blue sack and  
folded himself into it.  
There are UNO cards and bubbles,  
laminated papers,  
a large cup of coffee *para el*  
and stickers, oh,  
there are stickers.

The client is ten years old,  
a mop of curly Chia-pet hair,  
clothes from a growth spurt ago, a shy smile,  
“A gentleman,” my colleague calls him,  
as he pulls two chairs  
out of the trailer for us.

Nothing like his referral.

The client votes among three options

1. Bubbles
2. UNO
3. “Getting to know you game”

“You know what I’m going to say,” he says, laughing, “UNO!”

We play UNO, and he is the one in charge of the rules,  
in charge of the world.

He eats his Big Mac,  
never letting it drop from his hands as it  
steadily diminishes in size.

It is a half of a Big Mac  
a quarter of a Big Mac  
going, going  
gone.

My colleague will be passing off this client to me  
as he transitions out of his role.

He says dramatically,

“I trust her so you can trust her,”

and the client, who migrated here from El Salvador with his mom  
*a pie*

who is no stranger to struggle or loss,  
faith, anger, UNO, injustice  
starts gently tearing at the plastic tablecloth  
ripping it slowly and persistently,  
undoing what has been done.

“It ripped,” he says, “I ripped it.”

He continues ripping it into tinier and tinier strips

as the UNO game ends,  
cards smush back into the pack,  
the table folds up and  
away,  
the chairs shrink into tiny bags.  
The Big Mac is gone,  
and we tote the dining room chairs back into  
their trailer home,  
guarded by a  
dancing queen bee.  
Soon my colleague  
will be packed away too  
he stops.  
“May I take a picture of the three of us to remember you,  
and so you remember me?”  
The client’s rejoinder is the gravely shriek of a  
pterodactyl.  
Together, we dinosaur roar  
the three of us  
for the photo.  
And say goodbye  
kicking up dirt,  
our true ground,  
skirting around the sting  
and dance of the bee  
walking away,  
under the hot halo  
of a watchful,  
blinding and  
beautiful sun.

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