

mamí

By: Raquel Olvera

*Then I commended mirth, because a (woman) hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry. Then joy will accompany them in their toil all the days of the life God has given them under the sun.* Ecclesiastes 8:15

My mother has the horribly frustrating and head-spittlingly infuriating ability to laugh. Everywhere. Everywhen.

I hate it.

“Why are you always happy, mamí?”

“If you’re not laughing, you’re crying, mamí,” she sighs.

My mother calls me mamí even though I call her mamí. When my abuelita was still here, my mother called her mamí too. Once when we were all in the kitchen, my mother yelled, “Mamí?!” My grandmother and I both turned around at the same exact time. Mamí, mamí, and mamí. My mother threw her head back and held her sides — the air now perfumed with her laughter. “No I meant *mamí*?” “WHICH ONE?” I screamed at her. And suddenly all at once I was drowning in the music of her joy.

“Why do you call me *mamí*, mamí?” I asked.

“Because you are my little mother,” she giggled.

What does it mean to be my mother’s mother as her only daughter?

I’m always crying. I cry at car insurance commercials and Kanye’s most blasphemous song, my dog’s paws and the scent of incense, old people holding hands and reading stories. Driving down the 110 blasting “Landslide” by Dixie Chicks is in fact my favorite way to cry. I once cried at a lemon. It was just sitting on my counter looking perfect and lonely and soft and rough and I thought, “But what about its little lemon family?” And then I started crying.

*If you’re not laughing, you’re crying.*

“But how?” I ask her.

“You will learn, mamí,” she always responds. Her now wrinkled hand wipes away a tear because I am, inevitably, crying for absolutely no reason at all.

I don’t tell her this but I wonder if she laughed when my uncles — , or when my brother — , or when I — , or when my dad — , or when my dad — , or when my dad — . I wonder if she’s laughing right now.

Maybe my mother crafted her mouth into her other womb — her pain powerful enough to transform into embryonic fluid so that every time she opens her mouth, it is a birth. Or maybe she trained her laughter to be

a russian doll — to somehow hide a sob in a song. Or maybe she compelled her body into a cocoon — wrapping each moment so tightly in the silk of her soul that butterflies have no chance but to rush out every time she unfurls.

If I am my mother's little mother, there is a chance that I taught her how to laugh once. Maybe I can remember what I seem to have forgotten. Maybe I can crawl back into the womb of her mouth and this time, when I feel the world for the very first time, I'll be laughing.

I'll be my mother's mother and I'll teach her how to laugh even harder. Together we will be the villains of joy.

And the next time I see a lemon, I'll know exactly what to do.