

“In the beginning, God created the Heavens and the Earth”

When it rained, not even his teotl could stop Huitzilihuitl from laying in and taking in each second and moment.

He and his sisters spent every precious emotion that came and let their hair and clothes weigh heavy from being soaked. Nothing else mattered when it was raining on dry land.

They knew every emotion of the Earth and sang along with the cacti that lapped up rain water. The dry and cracked paths along the pueblos became mud and it sang as it was soothed by the heavy rain. Like the most tender of lotions, it healed the pieces so worn away that ached and moaned. Each breath in and out was something so sacred.

But Huitzilihuitl had never seen rain like this.

He had never smelled rain like this.

And he'd never thought that rain could be anything but water.

Yet the fire came down just like the drops of water he was so used to celebrating. It rained like a gift from the mythical almas that he heard about growing up. Only this was a curse. This was the land screaming and pleading for salvation - this was not the strong bond between man and Earth that he had been told of. This was not a beautiful blessing given to those who loved the land. Rather, this was her bleeding.

He'd sworn that he'd seen all that his government was capable of and he swore he knew of what lengths they would go to erase places like his home off of the map, but all Huitzilihuitl saw when he stared at the flames that ate up his home was proof that he did not know after all.

Xochitl and Tematlalehua needed him. That was the first clear thought that he had. They were somewhere along the lapping flames that destroyed everything so mercilessly. He felt fear in his stomach as he questioned whether or not they were among the grotesque scene he saw below. Neighbors that he knew were reduced to nothing and a stench in the air that told him all he needed to know about the fate of his people.

Xiuhtecuhtli was present in the flames he had always seen, but he knew in his bones that this was not the Divine Creator's wishes. This was not his plan and someone merely abused the gifts he so graciously left on Earth.

He could not manage to scream. Nothing came out but his legs moved. Each step strong, quick, and desperate. It burned and he wondered if his skin was peeling. If it bubbled and charred and he simply didn't feel it.

He watched as the only water that fell came from the tears of those along the outskirts of the pueblo. Each screaming face, pleading for the safety of ghosts as Huitzilihuitl foolishly ran to find his own.

Huitzilopochtli must have heard his screams because before the flames could claim him too, he was yanked back.

“Huitzilihuitl!”

His sister's voice brought him some sort of relief. When she pulled him into her arms he could breathe and the heat felt like nothing but a brush against his shoulder. A second pair found him and his breath quivered knowing they were safe. They were alive.

But outside of the safety of their embrace came the screams of Señora Josefina who only had one son left to mourn. He heard El Borracho from the corner begging for the sight of his daughter among the displaced. Someone he had lost long ago but now only realized how much he wished to say goodbye. Señor Apollinar whom he had grown with was not with his daughters and they looked to Huitzilihuitl, who was safe in his sister's embrace, with heartbreak.

He couldn't help but wonder how selfish it was to be grateful they were not among the dead. But really, what stuck on his mind the most as his sisters pulled him away from the burning waves was that this felt like a bastardization of their own mourning practices.

It was late at night so the flames were bright orange and red against a now violet sky.

The smoke that filled the air was not the gentle blowing into the next life. It was a giant and destructive beast's fist against the Earth that left nothing for the people to truly mourn.

That is how Huitzilihuitl sat for hours far from the town.

It was where his eyes remained fixated until the flames died down but the morning sky split across them in a way that left him unsure if it was really over.

That is the image that was burned into his mind as his sisters cleaned his wounds and tried to ground him to reality. But reality was far away. He was floating in the in betweens. Or perhaps he was high in the skies like the birds. His feathers were a bit burned but he flew anyway, chasing each cloud and searching for the next place to rest.

"A gas pipe blew. How unfortunate" was what the nuns said when they saw him walk by. Huitzilihuitl never liked church but he supposed it was better here than on the streets.

"It killed a lot of them." whispered another. Her words were laced with contempt. He was sitting in the courtyard of the place, waiting for Xochitl or Tematlalehua to join him too. But all he could dwell on until then was how the nun referred to him.

Them.

As if they were animals to slaughter or insects beneath their heels. *Them*. They spoke with such conviction that he almost believed there was something inherently wrong with all that stepped through God's gates.

Huitzilihuitl stood and stared at La Virgen. She watched over this cathedral. He laughed and turned away, spitting at the ground. The floors were dirty.

It made mud.

"Huitzil?" Tematlalehua's voice broke through the emotions and reached towards him. She held fruit that looked a day away from molding and bread that was plucked in many places. He knew that she had taken the parts that gave away its quality.

Much like his clothes, it was weary, worn, but it still remained.

"I want to go home, Tematlalehua." he simply said. He bit into the bread that tasted sour and the fruit that was bruised and felt like wet sand in his mouth.

But they all knew that they had no home now. They lay at the mercy of God.

God, who did not exist in this house. In this cathedral. This building was filled only with ghosts.

A pile of mud was the only sign of life.

Deuteronomy 31:8 – "The Lord himself will go before you. He will be with you; He will not leave you or forget you. Don't be afraid and don't worry."

When the Church abandoned them, they were left to the wolves.

Their town had burned down and been reduced to nothing but ashes. Memories of their danzas, their gardens, the laughter shared between them were gone. Homes were crumbling and their belongings forever gone. Things reeked of gasoline long after the fires calmed down.

They had mourned many nights and knew they would mourn many more. However, soon whispers began to find the ears of those left. Soon, people were hearing of plans to go North and it stirred the emotions of the community.

North was ground none of them had touched on, but land that plenty were aware of. They all knew someone or the friend of someone who went North. It was a horrifying decision to make and it came with many broken hearts.

After all, community was above all else and leaving was a betrayal. But Huitzilihuitl could not pretend to feel like there was something more waiting for them in what was now a graveyard of memories and moments in time.

None of the triplets saw something fruitful in their old home. Their shop that they ran was burned to the ground. Years of taking care of it, of feeding the mouths of children nearby, and making bonds that existed only there were gone. It was all gone. Dust and ash returning to the Earth leaving them with no home, no community, and no job.

So the triplets stood still in their considerations, regardless of the doubts they felt individually.

Tematlalehua didn't want to leave. Huitzilihuitl knew this deeply. He saw the disdain in her eyes when the subject was brushed on too long. But just like her brother and sister, she was connected to them in a way that reached beyond her wants. She would never stay behind and so leaving was without question. She would do it for them.

Xochitl wasn't the grandest fan either. But she was much less vocal about it. She understood that Huitzilihuitl did not make this decision out of contempt for their home, but rather in hopes that they might be able to give back to home that they knew. It was hard in Mexico and it would be hard in the US. Life was that way for those like them.

It was Huitzilihuitl who had suggested it and so the other two agreed. But they knew it was nothing their brother was fond of either.

"They're talking about us in the church," Tematlalehua said while making them dinner, "Not everyone is thrilled we're leaving."

"You know how the pueblo is," he said, "I know it's hard, but--"

"We have no home." Xochitl finished, "And we're relying on the church too much which you don't like. We know."

He frowned. It was no secret that though he tried to stay positive and look for some sort of light in it all, he did not find comfort in this box. But when he thought of the rosary, La Virgen, El Padre, El Hijo, y El Espiritu Santo, he felt nothing but disdain. That was one of the biggest differences between them. Though, he did not hate his sisters for how they felt and they did not hate him either.

Huitzilihuitl wasn't very prideful in many things but this seemed to be one. When he stood before the cross in the cathedral he did not feel the community that his sisters described. He felt little of the God that was supposed to love all of his children. All that he felt was anger and confusion as to why his people's lives weren't enough.

"It's not just that and you know it." he said.

Xochitl sighed. She stood from her seat and walked over, cupping her brother's face, "But it's a big part. We know. I'm not mad at you, but I already know what is going on in your head."

Xochitl was the one most devoted to the church. She came to Mass, she veiled, she prayed to La Virgen. She found community with the people that he swore he did not understand. She spent her time in this place with these decorated walls and she held her rosary.

She claimed that she did not believe in the Christian God but in the Creator manifesting in what ways they could for them. Sometimes he felt like he understood, but most days he did not.

"I just want us safe, Xochi." he said softly. His shoulders fell and he closed his eyes. Something about meeting his sister's eyes in this state felt forbidden.

Xochitl did not shame him. She did not raise her voice, she only embraced him.

"I'm going to miss it here. Even if there's not anything left to miss." Tematlalehua said, "This has been home for many years."

“I know.” her brother said. His head moving away from Xochitl’s touch, “But we can’t stay here. We have to search for better.”

“Is our land not enough?” she snapped back.

“No! I mean yes -” Huitzilihuitl groaned, “Here has always been enough but we were hardly living before and now we have no jobs, no home. It’s time for us to look for what we can.”

This wasn’t the first time they argued about the subject since the town went ablaze. This wouldn’t be the last time either. The two of them consistently butt heads throughout this and the wait to meet the coyote.

“We don’t have almas.” he finally said, “We can’t move mountains or stop the waves of the ocean by our own will. We’re just human and I am just looking to find something for us to survive on.

We can earn better money, give back to the town.”

His sister fell silent like she typically did during their arguments. He was unsure what else he could say or do to reassure her. He was horrid at comforting anyone and when it came to this subject, he wasn’t sure there was much he could say to offer anything other than disappointment and frustration.

“Whatever.” Tematlalehua said, “Let’s eat.”

Eating was how she ended the conversation or arguments. Huitzilihuitl could not begin to count the amount of times that she offered a bowl of fruit or some meat as a replacement for an apology or sign to end the topic.

“We’re going to be fine.” Xochitl told Tematlalehua anyway, “When have we not taken care of each other?”

And he thought that this was the end of the conversation. He was sure that they could only move forward and leave from there. With only a day before they left to meet the coyote, he was sure that everyone had said what they were feeling.

But when morning rolled around, the triplets woke to neighbors and friends surrounding them. Many disapproving, but all knowing that there weren’t many other options following this tragedy.

They were at a forked path between two governments that cared very little what happened to them. They were nothing but pawns to them and toys to abuse. He would have to be a fool not to expect harsh working conditions, poor pay, and new suffering with their departure.

Still, it felt vile on the tongue. All of the town knew it. To consider America something better than home was a lie and it was sickening. To view leaving as a solution was horrid even now as a last result.

This is what brought the bitterness that people felt. They knew the triplets well and had grown hearing their dreams and aspirations. But to say they were leaving for better felt like an insult no matter what way it was presented.

Huitzilihuitl knew this and so he did not view America as a solution. Only as a desperate plead for help. He did not have to live there already to know the American Dream was shit.

All of the pueblo knew it was dogshit.

“Leaving is ultimately your decision, but remember to stay safe.” was the advice of Señora Josefina. Tematlalehua and Xochitl prayed with her for a safe journey. Some of the nuns and other women in the town joined them.

Huitzilihuitl chose to talk to everyone else. He did not want to ruin their moment but he also lacked any interest in praying.

Instead, he walked outside of the church and stared at the bright sky. It shone like lives weren’t lost. The world turned and ignored his agony. But it did that to everyone.

It was during times like these that he clutched the hummingbird around his neck and begged Huitzilopochtli to give him strength. Anything, everything, *something*. He begged for it and realized

that he was not all that different from his sisters and La Virgen that they found comfort within. He too was but a man begging the universe to spare him from the suffering he was facing.

“Don’t take shit with you. Not that we have any.” came from El Borracho. He never did find his daughter. The town knew what this meant but nobody had the heart to tell it to him. Though he must have known too deep down too.

Funny enough, he was the only person that Huitzilihuitl found comfort with at the moment. He had not spoken to him much in the years. He was a clinging part of the community. Once he had been a man who was more active. But that was long ago - when the triplets were young and new to the Earth. He quickly turned into the man he was now and it was all that he had to remember him from.

“Everything we have to take is on our backs.” he replied. He did not smoke, but moments like this felt like ones where it might be a justified decision to make. He didn’t have a drink either. But he wasn’t sure if he wanted to ask for one.

El Borracho nodded, “The journey is going to be hard. Are you ready for that?”

“I am.”

“But are you really?”

El Borracho looked at him, eyes peering inside of Huitzilihuitl. They looked at him as he was - a boy in the process of becoming a man. He saw him as the seventeen-year-old boy that he was. The one who thought himself to be more of a man than he was or would be until later. It was a shaking feeling and it made him wonder what else he could see. The fear, the anxiety, his bare soul. El Borracho saw it all and saw him as the Creator made him.

It made him squirm.

“I don’t know.” he said.

What did it mean to be ready? He was unsure if such a thing existed with these conditions that they were living in.

“Then you aren’t ready. But that does not have to be a bad thing.” El Borracho told him, “But if you are not ready to learn how hard things can be, this journey will eat you alive. The gringos have done a lot with their money. They pay well to attempt to keep us out.”

He didn’t understand how he could say that. He disliked that El Borracho spoke like he knew it himself and was not here in Mexico too. As if he wasn’t El Borracho.

“We’ll be fine. We meet with the coyote tomorrow. He’ll explain what we need to know.” he said, nerves starting to vibrate outside of the comfort he had initially felt. He could hear the ocean in his ears and the quaking Earth was felt in his chest.

“My son went North. He was supposed to send for us. He never did.”

He didn’t want to hear these things. It only invoked fear and he could not afford that. It made him worry more than he should.

He was already terrified of the beasts of machines that they owned. The ways that they could wipe them off the face of the Earth if they so wished at the press of a button. Huitzilihuitl was terrified of what could come if they wished and was simply praying for it to not be true.

He had nightmares about the United States before.

It was hard not to.

Sometimes, he thought too deeply about the weapons that they had in their grasp. It was hard not to with how tensions in the world had been rising. He was plagued with images of their weapons destroying the land and filling it with poison. He was plagued even more with night terrors about the military and the men within it.

Huitzilihuitl was terrified of the gringos.

He was terrified of what could happen to his sisters too.

“I tell you this because you and your sisters are good people. Be prepared.”

“I will.”

“When you get there, send back to me. So I know you made it.”

He wondered what it was about El Borracho that he asked these things. Like he knew him much more deeply than he did. And then Huitzilihuitl thought that maybe he did and it was him who did not know El Borracho.

“I don’t even know your name, Señor.”

“Ahuiliztli.”

What a name for someone that he had spend so long pitying. And then he wondered if his pity meant anything or if it was his own preconceived judgements on this man who now had no children.

“I will send for you when we get there.” he promised. The panic that he had felt and the buzzing that had made him nauseous calmed down. He was not afraid nor uncomfortable - he was thinking.

The door creaked and he stepped out of the way. His sister’s stepped out, finished praying.

“Thank you, Señor.” he told El Borracho. It was time to leave and say goodbye to everyone else left before they began the journey.

“What did you talk about with him?” Tematlalehua asked.

“We talked about life.” he replied.

That’s what it came down to, wasn’t it? Life. Being ready, growing, and being perceived as you are. He didn’t know how else to summarize his talk with El Borracho.

He was preparing a dangerous journey and he was sending back to a drunkard.

No. He stopped himself this time as he thought that. He was sending back to Ahuilitzi.