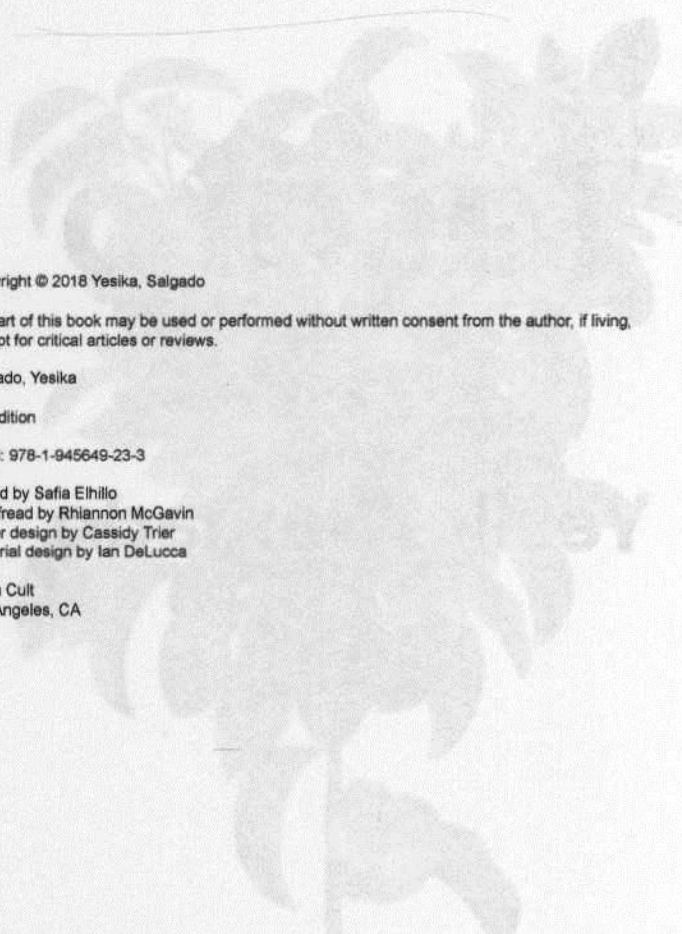




Tesoro

Yesika Saigado



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Not a Cult
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Canela

I am a brown woman who writes poetry about her brown life. I read it out loud and my accent curls the corners of my words. I am made of two languages coiled into the braid of my tongue. I belong to this country and to the one who birthed my mother. I write the coffee-stained edges of my world. the soft caramel of my grandmother. the hazelnut of my sisters. the cinnamon skin of the man I love. I am built of colors. I have named them holy and they each bring the poems to me. look at the cursive of my flesh. it is how the stories arrive. it is how they leave. with me. intact. inseparable. complete.

The Women

where do I begin?

mami?

my tías?

my grandmother?

do I follow the bruises to El Salvador?

do I dissect each fist here in Los Angeles?

I am a freight train with no conductor

all I know is the blow of my whistle

a single question:

how did you survive the men?

Mami's Cooking

Mami says that every house should always have a pot of frijoles. Mami says that good pupusas aren't only about the ingredients but also about how round they are. that every cup of coffee needs pan dulce. an egg, queso fresco and a tortilla can be a meal. the chicken needs more tomato sauce. she needs to bake something to warm up the house. banana bread because the bananas are going bad. keeps the stale rolls in the freezer to make bread pudding later. Mami says the cousins are coming over and need feeding. the neighbor brought over carne asada and she has to cook something to return with their plate. asks if I am ready for dinner. says try this. take a little bite. I put some away for you. Mami and her small kitchen. the rattle of her dishes. her heavy pans. her smile as we eat and say *que rico*. her dancing eyes when we ask for more. Mami and the way she feeds us her neverending heart. *come taste this. I saved you some. do you want me to pour it into a bowl? I was waiting for you.*

San Vicente, El Salvador

e

I lay
a starfish girl
on the bed of a pickup truck
the sky
a candy blue
as we drive up
the road
cutting like
a party ribbon
around a volcano
another truck
bigger and dustier
than ours roars by
it is heavy with men
covered in ash and sweat
I know by their tired faces
they've been working
the cotton or sugar fields all day
they are headed home
to warm tortillas and frijoles

maybe if it's a good day
una sopa de pollo

San Vicente
is church bells
and a cathedral
I can see for miles

the sun is setting
the sky a watercolor painting

I sit up and my hair
becomes a waving flag

we drive in and out
of small towns and villages
each a knot of noise, of color, smells
each a rosary bead
each a pebble leading us home

I am
only eyes
no mouth
no hands
I give my heart
to the horizon
this is my land
I was made of this dirt

San Vicente a speck behinds us
I am a starfish girl again
the stars are out and waving back at me

I pray we never stop driving
but the road becomes familiar
I hear my uncle and mother laughing
from inside the truck's cabin
as we slow

I sit up again
for a second there
I was all Salvadoran
the sky, volcano and road agreed

The Therapist

e

I asked my therapist if everyone had to work this hard to be a good person. if everyone else felt this exhausted all the time.

she looked at me like she wanted to cry

I sighed. she was a young white woman who moved here from a quiet white town. people like her don't ask themselves if they're good. they don't ask themselves anything about themselves. they just go on living.

brown women, we've had to learn to be mean. to be sharp tongue and sharper teeth. I wasn't born tough. I was soft a long time. but I did inherit a mouth that never stops. I can talk my way out of any room, into any heart. what to do with this kind of power? how to keep it from going bad? every day I wake up, I say to myself, *be good. be good. be good.* sometimes I'm not and I think about it for weeks.

the woman is confused.

I stop trying to explain. I think of my tías and mami. their gossip at the table as a means to survival. *be careful with him. don't trust her; do you know that...* we are used to having things taken from us. we turn to our words. good words. bad words. words that say too much. I am too much. all the time. it is a blessing. it is a curse.

the therapist nods.