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I Am

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I AM

I am

Miguel M. Morales

I am from comals and microwaves,
from manteca and Hamburger Helper.

I am from the hot, dry fields and air-conditioned classrooms of Texas,
which made me both warm and cold blooded.

I am from crops of soybeans, corn, and cotton,
from a backyard garden of okra, cucumbers, and roses,
from saying the rosary with my arms extended like Jesus on the cross,
and from my Puerto Rican grandmother's curly, kinky hair,
which no one else in my family has.

I am from parents whose parents died when they were young
and sisters who were forced to raise theirs.

I am from an amusement park of wit ranging from sarcastic bumper car jabs to rollercoaster-like tales
and from depression so deep that only time can leach away its generational poison.

I am from "the devil is going to get you" to "you aren't a real Mexican because you don't speak Spanish,"
from tattered brown scapulars promising first Saturday salvation,
and from enduring suffering for the conversion of sinners.

I am from the forsaken plains of the Texas panhandle but no city there was ever my home.

I am from shiny-armored Conquistadores and bare-chested Mestizos and Boricuas.

I am the conqueror and the conquered.

I am from mastectomies, hysterectomies, bypasses, eyeglasses, heart disease, and diabetes,
from emergency calls late at night that lead to cross-country trips
and eating from hospital vending machines.

I am from chipped statues of la virgin,
from photos with burning candles by them,
and from calendars that mark the days for the living and the dead.

I am from a family that loves dogs but could never keep one,
from moving at night in garbage bags before the rent was due,
and from starting school in October instead of August because of work.

I am Luke Skywalker and Cesar Chavez.