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Arroz y Enchiladas Rojas

Cynthia Serrano
Humboldt State University

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Arroz y enchiladas rojas
by Cynthia Serrano

At any given time, when you were alive,
you had red enchilada sauce and a pan of arroz guisado
ready to feed anyone who walked through the door,
your upbringing dictating the movements of your day.

I say I miss your arroz most of all, but it's not true.
There are other parts that I miss,
parts that gather in my mind's eye when I think of you,

like your smile, which never showed your teeth
but always reached your eyes
and never failed to show your warmth and glee,

and your skin, soft caramel gathered in wrinkles,
the warmest I ever held.
Will my skin be as soft and brown one day?

And your hair, curly until I reached age 15,
was not natural but
chemically enhanced and cropped close to your scalp.

No one would guess your hair once hung past your waist,
heavy and pin straight.
Not even me, for I had known your short hair my whole life.

The urge to cut all your hair was not an individual experience;
you passed it onto your daughters,
and your granddaughters, in turn, took it up too.

I feel the same urge: to cook your rice and model your industriousness,
to grow your hair. But I've fallen short;
my rice is not soft enough, my hair only hangs past my shoulders.

One day I too hope to be prepared, to mother a clan of women
who cut and recut, grow and regrow their hair,
but for now, sigo guisando tu arroz y mi pelo sigue creciendo.