Student A

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From Dust to Dust

Personal Narrative

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He was a few feet away from me when I saw his tattered and filthy uniform. The air smelled like undercooked pizza, *chicharrones*, and *taqueros*. There were particles of dust blowing endlessly through the dry, searing air-- silence. The heat of the sun seemed to scorch me as I thought more about what I wanted to do.

Recess on the border of Mexico wasn’t like recess here in the U.S. There were no playgrounds or swings because the school couldn’t afford them and kids wouldn’t know what to do with them. The smell of dust and pollution was permanent no matter how hard you washed your uniform. The only method of “fun”was the outback of the school, where you never knew what you were going to find, whether it was wild bullies let loose or sketchy drug dealers hanging on the edge. The outback was a desert to us. It was filthy and dry with bird excrement and flies everywhere. Sitting on the benches was a challenge because we often had to brush aside remnant pieces of food and maggots. There were no adults around to supervise. We were left in the outback to fend for ourselves.

I was in the courtyard of my school, Felipe Carrillo Puerto, and it was seemingly another normal day. School was just as dirty as the day I started, and I still couldn’t afford my uniform. There was dust all over my black shoes and my white shirt that day. I could feel bullets of sweat falling off my forehead from how torrid it felt outside. My sweaty body and dusty pants created an unbearable chafe that always lead to blisters on my thighs and ankles. Giovanni always smelled fresh and crisp, like his mother would put a cologne on him every day just to make sure he at least smelled presentable. He had the scent of an older man, maybe like his grandpa. It smelled strong—hard to miss in a crowd. It was kind of a bittersweet smell but mostly bitter---maybe the scent of an old casino. His clothes were old and ragged but he smelled like a rich old man. His eyes were glossed over and his smile never left his face. He had thick, black curly hair that would, every once in a while, cover his eyes because he did leap frogs alone in the courtyard during recess. He didn’t talk much, and when he did his speech was slurred. He had a high pitched laugh you could compare to the Joker. When he was in distress or upset, it was the most heartbreaking sound you could hear. It sounded like you were dragging someone to their death, and often times he probably felt that way.

As he did leap frogs through the courtyard I found myself thinking about the Coca-Cola Luz offered me. I didn’t want it. I took it out of courtesy. I mean she was a *fresa*. You couldn’t simply refuse something from a *fresa*---they were ruthless. *Fresa* translates to strawberry, but it’s a slang term for someone like a “plastic” from *Mean Girls*. I called my group of friends “The Fresa Mafia” because for being 3rd grade girls, they were quite vicious. They were the only people that wanted to be friends with me, probably because they thought I was rich. You get treated like a pearl if your skin color is white in Mexico.

I saw Giovanni through the shards of dust blowing through the air, and I decided to give him the drink Luz gave me. I felt the sun scorching me. It was barely Coca-Cola by the time we were finished with our creation. We put rocks, dirt, chewed gum and spit into the bottle. The Coke was only there to “water it down”.

He drank the entire bottle with no hesitation.

Did I do it because he was a boy? Was it his scent? His vulnerability? Was it because man—being flawed as we are-- was created from dust? Maybe I did it to prove I was strong. Maybe I wanted to prove that even though I felt dirty because I was being raped every night, *I* had power over Giovanni in that brief moment of time. I was a pearl in the eyes of my abuser—and I had cast myself low enough to be before swine. Not too soon after that, I told my father about my abuse.

Dust in our lives is on every single valuable relationship we hold dear to us if we choose to let it stay. It covers life if we choose to passively live while the people around us *live.* We are the antagonists of our own stories---the fallen heroes, the Macbeths and the Hamlets, but just because we fall doesn’t mean we can’t get up and dust ourselves off. When we cast ourselves before swine, it doesn’t mean we won’t be picked up by someone that sees our value. From dust my story was made, to dust it returned over the years.

I haven’t returned to Reynosa since, and eight weeks after I moved away, there was a school shooting at Felipe Carrillo Puerto. 10 people were killed and 20 were injured. I don’t know if Giovanni survived. And I’m still here.