



LAND OF THE CRANES

BY AIDA SALAZAR

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WHAT I KNOW:

I know my school's shiny floors
a broken water fountain
and boxed chocolate milk
I buy for fifty cents.

I know Ms. Martinez
and her
happy handshakes
at her door
before each fourth-grade morning.

I know how to write
and draw the picture poems
Ms. Martinez taught us
to paint our feelings.

I know to never forget
to scribble my name and date
on the bottom.

I know recess on the blacktop
and the length of my golden
brown crane wings
in the desert sun.

I know my BFF, Amparo
climbs los columpios like wind.

I know aftercare until six p.m.
when Papi comes to get me
 between
 his two jobs
and carries me home
 on his
strong shoulders
 so high I find
 flight.

HOW I LEARNED TO FLY

Blue sky flight
began
with a ripple
of feathers
tickled by air
on the surface
of my dancing arms.

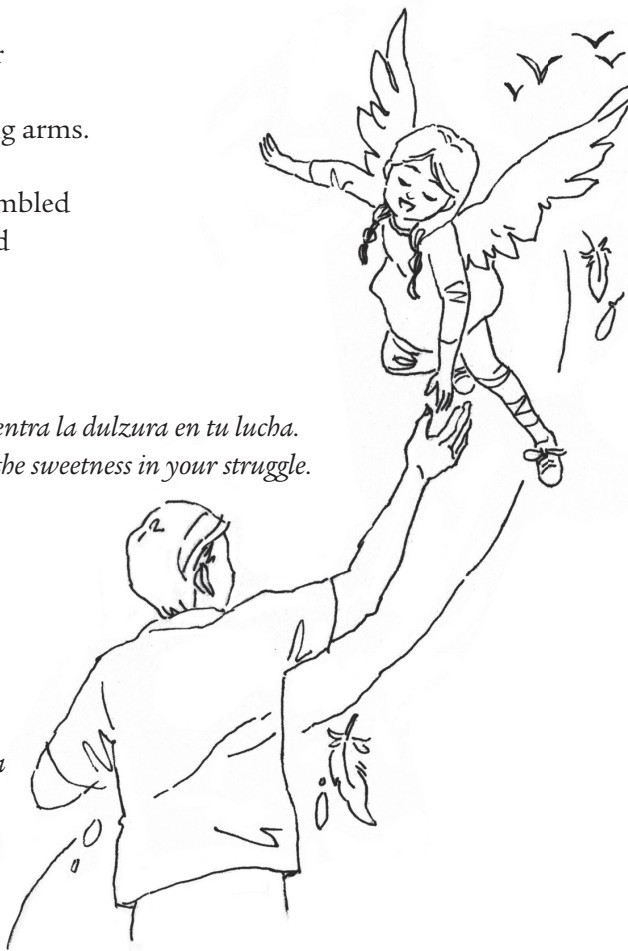
Sprouting wings stumbled
with the wind
pushed sideways
at first

I heard
Papi's voice,

*Encuentra la dulzura en tu lucha.
Find the sweetness in your struggle.*

Then, a breath
a thought
to spell
my smiling name
with my wings
big circles to form
Roberta, Betita
my name like Papi's
Roberto, Beto.

Then, a glide
a laugh so loud



looked down to see
las casas, las yardas,
and barking dogs
of our vecindad
become tiny
dots and squares
as I floated
above

with Papi flying beside me
ready to catch me
all the way home.