

Everything You Make with Your Hands

Todo lo que haces con tus manos tiene valor she said, and we knew what she meant. That Christmas card of glitter glue and crayon. That yarn potholder born from a tiny loom like a lute. Even the Pinewood Derby car, blue with a white stripe down the middle, wobbling its way into seventeenth place. We knew the making of it was the point, what gave it worth.

And we thought we knew all the things her hands had made—tortillas, enchiladas, empanadas for Easter, tamales for Christmas Eve, a Thanksgiving turkey roasted in mole, and three dozen buñuelos to share with my fifth-grade class. For my mom and tía Isa she sewed dresses to match their Christmas dolls, and Isa, knowing what they were worth, played only with my mom's, cutting its hair and dragging it through the dirt until it was ragged, while the colors on hers remained bright. Though that one is gone now. Gone, too, the bedspread she quilted for me when I was small, a yellow ducky in a forest green border that faded to sickly olive as I clutched it to myself for a decade, feeling each even stitch for comfort until it disintegrated in a slow blizzard of batting and fabric. I shiver to remember. As for the rest—the aprons and folklórico dresses and baby blankets with crocheted edges—it's only a matter of time. Only a matter of time for us. Already we have passed the anniversary of the day when the last great-grandchild who remembers being cradled in her trembling hands will pass away. And then the day after, when we rise up, unabashed, quickened by the knowledge that she meant us, that cradling too is creation, that we were the first and final work of her dark, refining hands.

—John Alba Cutler

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