

Those esquites ground me:
they are the means to smile back
at her wherever she is.

At the Corner of Xicoténcatl And Ignacio Allende

Karolina Ulloa***

I barely noticed my grandmother was growing old. When I did, it came as a shock. She raised me, so all I saw was strength and endurance. She was lively, rambunctious, and unruly. So the day when I walked with her to the *pollería* I didn't realize I was leaving her behind. She jogged to catch up with me and asked me to please stop running. I did, literally. But figuratively, I'd been slipping away for a while. I loved her, but, as a teenager, I had begun to resent her for loving me too much.

One day, probably during my first year of college, I asked her to take me to the historic center of Coyoacán. I was craving *esquites*, and not your one-in-every-corner-kind: I salivated for my *esqui-*

tes, a steaming cup of corn kernels, fried with *chile de árbol*, cooked in chicken broth with *epazote*, then further enhanced with lime juice and salt. I'd already located my street stall right where Xicoténcatl and Ignacio Allende meet. Those *esquites* are the perfect balance between spicy, lush, and comforting. The very presence of the seller was reassuring. I still haven't discovered what my *esquitero's* secret is, but what it does for my whole body is nothing short of magic.

My grandmother and I sat down in a bench, overlooking the shopfronts where she'd bought me many overpriced costumes. We were silent. I have no idea of what we used to talk about before I became defiant. But now I know that what I really resented was that none of the people I'd come across cared for me as much as she did, even if I desperately wanted them to. I was jealous of her ability to look after everyone and annoyed at how she could laugh, loudly and unapologetically, when life seemed so unfair. I stupidly wanted to be everything my grandmother wasn't so that I didn't have to go through the pains of feeling too much.

We were silent, but she was cheerful and jumpy, like a little girl. She might have grabbed my free hand as we were busy devouring our toasted corn. She looked at me and thanked me for having taken her out for *esquites*. I thought it was nothing, but it was the whole world.

I was spoiled, lovingly, until the day she suddenly passed. I wish she knew me today, for generosity is the sword I live by. When she died, she took her seasoning with her. But the *esquites*, those *esquites*, are a divine tool to get close to her. In recent years I've seen less of the original seller, but I've come across his sons' bright faces. It's the same recipe: the same sustaining hand that held me on the day I sat on a bench with my grandmother. Those *esquites* ground me: they are the means to smile back at her wherever she is. **NMM**

*** Karolina is a lecturer at UNAM's Undergraduate Program in English Language and Literatures; you can contact her at carolinaulloah@filos.unam.mx.