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introduction: tierra

we sit in the cab of an aging 3/4 ton ford pick-up. the road in front of us is what any country road should be, filled with ruts, wash-boards and dust. we make our way east toward the sangre de cristos. it is winter. my brother drives, me in the middle, and on the passenger side sits my abuelito; his name is Amos Serafin Abeyta. at this point in my life i am still afraid of him. he has eyes that see through people. abuelito knows only work. six a.m. and it is time to feed the animals. this is how i remember my childhood in moments of what needs to be done at a certain time. the bible says that for everything there is a time. today is our time to load the aging ford with bales of hay, alfalfa and tasole. to the west above the san juans there are clouds gathering, white above the peaks of white. it is the white on white of snow gathering up its breath before it descends into the valley and blows over the brown vegas, the newborn calves, the frozen conejos. it is winter in canon. we, my brother and i, load the truck, seven high, 63 bales, and then we tie it with a come-a-long and a lariat that has lost its loop. Andrew is the expert. he has always been the one my abuelito admires. he throws the bales perfectly. one motion. they always land where they should, how they should.

i am the listener. i do not know enough. i struggle with the bales, up to the thigh, turn the wrists, regroup my weight underneath myself and heave. for a moment the bale does what it should. it is a half turn side over side the orange twine parallel to the earth, but i have put too much of my right arm into the lunge, the push, the heave of the 80-pound bale. it twists in a way it shouldn't, does not sail high enough, seven high. Andrew, left handed, reaches down and with one hand he grabs it, places it where it should go. i am the listener. abuelito tells me how it should have been done. how it was done in the 1930s, 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s, and how it should still be done in the 1980s. Andrew is the worker. the left handed worker is like the mountains which surround us, he is what my abuelito likes to look at. i am now 25 years old and this is finally o.k. with me.

Juan Sanchez is and was his name. he is my great grandfather, bisabuelo. i never knew him. mogote flowered beneath his touch; with the urging of his shovel he was able to make anything grow from this

rich rocky soil. bisabuelo Juan knew how to irrigate. the hay we have just finished loading is a testament to his irrigating. the fields he plowed alone, irrigated and harvested alone have made it through the decades, and they still grow. i listen. abuelito tells the story as we return with our load of hay. El Juan como pedia regar. by the time we reach canon with our teetering load we too agree that, yes, Juan Sanchez sure could irrigate. it is an art. irrigating is the brushstroke for what becomes the winter painting of two young men loading hay as their abuelito watches.

tierra means earth. everything good comes from the earth or to the earth. what travels through the air, snow, rain, sparrows, must eventually come to this field of dormant clover where 63 bales lie broken, scattered, surrounded by cows, sheep, and the ever present horses. i listen. abuelito tells us about the beauty of feeding in the same fields where the hay was harvested. the bales are full of seed and our feeding them to these pregnant cows replants the tierra. in time this earth will give birth to a windy spring and the cows will have moved south to the llano with its white sage. the earth is a protective mother. Juan Sanchez knew this.

poetry means listening. a word well thrown side over side twine parallel to the earth is a beautiful thing. 63 words well stacked, tied down and later scattered over the earth are a poem. the poem is a protective mother. Juan Sanchez can live there with the windy colorado spring, the thick rivers, the ditches, the rocky fertile soil. Amos Serafin Abeyta can become a man i no longer fear. his eyes can be something i never knew them to be. Andrew, my brother, can be proud of his work in the poem.

the snow approaches quickly from the west. it is a light snow at first. come morning there will be at least a foot. my brother and i will wake during the malignant blue of dawn. that first thin strip of blue which forms over the sangre de cristos, changes hues, then grows beyond anything the night can counter with. we will dress, go out into the cold, and both of us listen to the snow fall.