

Wilderness House Literary Review 19/1

Iván Brave

Rotten Egg

Emiliano and I and ten others were kicking around a soccer ball, being middle schoolers, when a beat-up, orange Camaro rolled through the carpool lane. We had never seen it before.

The passenger was a woman with warts and a long nose. She asked, "Who wants a ride?"

The boys and I looked at one another like *hell no*.

"You?" she asked. She pointed to Emiliano, the least *indio* among us. He liked to play teacher's pet and always had something to prove.

"Yeah, you. Hop in."

Emiliano hopped in.



Used tissues, a hundred receipts, dirty magazines and boxer briefs, plus a box of zipper bags and Emiliano, all sat in the backseat.

The driver asked, "What's he thinking?" Her wrist was on the wheel. Red hair framed a face too hot to look at. She turned to Emiliano. "What you thinking?"

The passenger laughed. "I don't think he speaks English."

Meanwhile, Emiliano played with his sweatshirt hem and remembered how the door lock had popped when they parked under a white oak, about a mile down the road.

"I know what he's thinking."

The women got to swapping spit and moaning, stopping to wink at Emiliano every now and then, as if to entice him or scare him.

"Wanna taste?"

Emiliano did. But he jumped out of the car so fast that he crashed onto the pavement.

Before he could push himself up, a colossal weight pinned him. It was the woman with red hair, pressing herself against his back.

Her breath smelled of fresh mint, and she was telling him to calm down.

"You aren't a tattletale, are you?" she asked, letting go, fixing a bra strap.

Emiliano brushed gravel and glass off himself and whispered, "No."



At school the next day, Emiliano told us what happened. We assumed he was lying. That is until the bell rang, and he stepped into the same Camaro. It disappeared at an intersection.

It was only the driver this time.

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"Relax," she said, parking under the white oak again. "My name's Tammie."

Her voice was deep. It reminded Emiliano of his older cousin on the other side of the river, who smoked and hosted huge parties, only Tammie was older, smelled nicer, and had curvier. She fingered back the end of her hair to reveal the opening of her sundress, where breasts burst like grapefruits, wrinkled, big.

"They're not for staring, you know."

Emiliano trembled and wished desperately to calm down. He wanted her to keep talking, not to lean over Emiliano and open the door.

"You can go," she said. "You did yesterday."

But he wouldn't. He had pictured her on his back, him on hers, all night and all day. He even went through the motions of masturbation, but he didn't know how to finish. Now, her hand lay on his knee, circling it, before sliding up his thigh.

"I think you like boys," said Tammie. She rubbed him slow, slower than his pulse, and smiled when a sticky spot formed under his jeans. "You can tell me if you like boys."

"I like you," Emiliano said.

Tammie made him repeat the words.



The next day, Tammie said they should go to her apartment in Brownsville, "We'll have more privacy."

But before reaching the city, they stopped at a motel just past the last gas station. Outside the corner unit where they were headed, a fake plant in a plastic pot pretended to absorb sunlight, while a welcome mat stood there a little crooked from too much foot traffic. A voice in Emiliano told him to break away, that this was his last chance. But another voice promised to turn him into a man, if he just stepped through that door. He squeezed Tammie's hand tighter and matched her step, as they disappeared into the shadows.

A cloud of smoke loomed over a bearded, yellow-eyed man in an undershirt.

He said, "Yes, perfect," and walloped Emiliano in the stomach, before dragging him by his skater boy hair to a bathroom at the end of a long corridor, past many bedrooms full of screams, cries, and moans.

"Shower," he screamed. "I said shower!"

Dressed in nothing but the suds of a purple bar of soap, Emiliano stood in the bathroom, alone for the last time, and remembered Tammie.



"They locked us in a bedroom with no windows. Dozens of naked boys and girls, crying, sleeping, defecating. Some were as young as six or seven, but it was hard to tell. The oldest, the boy who had been there the longest, with hair on his body, told me how things worked."

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"How did it work?" I asked. This was years later. We were in a diner. I was paying.

"They would grab us one or two at a time," Emiliano said. "As soon as you saw someone open that door, you weren't supposed to look scared, or else they'd pick you."

Emiliano explained how different men would enter, touch their arms, fondle their bottoms, flick their nipples, like at a supermarket.

"My first time," Emiliano said, "a guy pointed to me and a young girl shivering in the corner with blood running down her leg.

"First the man did oral on me. Then he made me do oral on the girl. She was slapped every time she cried, and he punched her once when she peed. He made me lick his asshole while she kissed him and he masturbated. After he came, he pushed me on the girl and instructed me to fuck her. Once he got bored, he told us to stop. Then we got thrown back with the others."

Emiliano and I sat there, in the diner's light, quiet.

He shook his head. "And eggs, they fed us eggs, I remember."

"But how did you get out?"

Emiliano explained. Then, distracted, he added, "Why are some children called rotten eggs? It's not fair."