

Embroidering Revolution

VERÓNICA BAYETTI FLORES

Surfaces wiped down.

Flowers arranged.

Dress pressed and ready to wear.

Altar dusted and set.

Lila walked back and forth across her apartment, inspecting and tidying every corner.

In a couple of hours, people from neighborhoods all over the city would be stopping in to see her works of art. She was a domestic artist, her works of art better suited for her home than a gallery. The home was the site of display and interaction and added essential context to the work. She had become known for her attention to every single detail, both in her intricate embroideries



and textiles and in the environment in which they were presented. No color on the curtains was an accident, no plant on her windowsill lacking in meaning, no food served without thought—the rich histories of her kin and community woven into each element.

In the years since the Big Change, women and feminine-spectrum folks had ushered in a shift in the ways traditionally feminine art forms had been valued. Lila's abuela had been part of that revolution—part and parcel to the revolution of the Big Change itself, she had always said. Back when Lila's abuela was young, people didn't recognize her work as real art, mostly, as far as Lila could tell, because they were things that had been done traditionally by women and had been associated with the feminine. She had a hard time truly imagining it, but the detailed processes to which she dedicated herself so diligently—the painstaking stitching of her embroideries, the precise calculations, measuring, and cutting of her sewing—had instead been known as "crafts," kept distant from what was then called fine art. Keeping a beautiful home, making art out of textiles, and everyday cooking, were considered neat, maybe, but not really worth showing off.

Before the Big Change, people were only recognized for the ways they kept their homes or cooked if they were rich—if they used ingredients that were rare and cost a lot, or if they had a lot of things in their homes that were made by designers who would only create for those who had a lot of money.

But there weren't rich people anymore, or poor people, or money. After the Change, those who had relied on their riches to make things beautiful were left with the methods the rest of us had always used: our own hands and our own skills. Many of the people who had come from wealthy families were now learning techniques and skills passed down generation to generation from those whose families had never had wealth. Others just abandoned domestic creative pursuits altogether because they had only been interested in these arts as a way to show off. They had never engaged with the detailed and dedicated search for beauty in all things that Lila practiced.

For Lila's abuelita, the domestic arts had never been about ostentatious luxury. She, like Lila, had inherited a love for the small details and intoxicating beauty of domestic arts. Her folks, poor like many people were before the Change, had always needed to be resourceful. But they'd always made things beautiful, a practice where they could find unmitigated joy in a world that had so often been painful. The security that followed the Big Change was, for Lila's abuela and many others, an opportunity to expand, not abandon, her focus on the domestic arts that had always captivated her. And, of course, to pass them on.

It was Lila's abuelita who had taught her how to use onion peels, berries, beets, even black beans, as dyes, which she used to color yarns and fabrics and threads to knit colorful scarves, embroider family histories, or



liven up an old dress. It was her abuelita who instilled in her the value of the work of the feminine, and Lila felt lucky every day for her abuela's part in building the world she now enjoyed. It was on days like today that Lila missed her most, when she wished her abuela could see the world she was continuing to build with so many others thanks to her legacy.

Just a couple hours left now.

Lila slipped into her dress. She applied the annatto lip color she'd made last week and blew a kiss to the picture of her abuelita on the altar. She could almost hear her say it: "*Suerte, nena. You got this!*"

Verónica Bayetti Flores is a queer immigrant activist, writer, and artist. She has led national policy and organizing work on immigrant rights, reproductive health, and LGBTQ liberation.