Virgil Suárez

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So Much Like My father

My mother claims my feet are like my father's, pale, calloused. My temper like his, my exile... His hands I remember best, though not the hands of a blue collar worker, a butcher-horse feeder at the Havana zoo, later a pattern cutter in the factories of garment district Los Angeles.

My father laid his hands on me twice in my life, once because he saw me with a used condom in my mouth (I had found it on the sidewalk on my way home from school and thought it was a balloon) and the next time when I got lost at the San Diego zoo for a couple hours. I was twelve. He grabbed my neck hard and squeezed. I felt his rage, he my confusion...

I am thirty-eight now, my father's been dead for four years. I can feel his hands burning under ground, rooting themselves toward my feet, grabbing hold. My exile has become like his, my mother says. He grabs hold so we can both rage on, rage on.

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