

Under dust balls and cobwebs in a box
 her things rest like a secret.
 A mirror, some bobbypins, photograph,
 old nail polish and file reveal her espíritu
 in part, but leave the unsaid: ilegítima.
 It is through this word that I become a lens.

Through the lens
 I see her swim with her nieta. A box
 of toys nearby, toys denied her, toys that whisper ilegítima,
 whisper the secret,
 whisper ilegítima, the secret que no deja en sosiego su espíritu.
 But I remember el espíritu does not photograph.

I study the photograph,
 wonder if it is between the lens
 and the subject que el espíritu
 gets lost, or does it stay in the box-
 like structure of the camera, waiting for secret
 chemicals not yet invented. Then will my mamá have ilegítima

printed on her forehead? Ilegítima
 whisper las tías do not forget abuelita's secret.
 Their eyes made bigger by the lens
 of their glasses stare from the box,
 they say sufrir enriqueza el espíritu.

Entre ellas dicen que mi mamá tiene el espíritu
 viejo por el pecado inato de ser ilegítima.
 I try to leave their voices in the box,
 try to remember esas tías in the photograph
 are long dead, their words locked con el espíritu in the lens,
 ese pecado no longer secret.

In this poem it is not the secret
 abuelita wanted. My mamá's espíritu
 necesita socio. So, I will not let the lens
 keep esa palabra pecadora ilegítima.
 Then mamá and her nieta can swim in a photograph
 without tías whispering in the box,

fifty years peering through a lens: eres ilegítima.
 Dusty secret, mirrored en el espíritu
 is erased in this poem, not preserved in the photograph in the box.

VOICES IN A BOX: A Sestina

**Alicia
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