

AIDA SALAZAR

AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR OF *THE MOON WITHIN*

# LAND OF THE CRANES



Praise for *The Moon Within*

★ “A worthy successor to *Are You There God? It’s Me, Margaret* set in present-day Oakland. . . . Salazar’s verse novel is sensitive and fresh. . . . An authentically middle school voice and diverse Latinx cast make this book a standout.”  
—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

★ “An excellent addition for upper middle grade and middle school readers, especially for maturing tweens in the midst of puberty.”  
—*School Library Journal*, starred review

★ “With sensitivity, Salazar purports that menstruation is a source of feminine strength, inexorably and beautifully connected to the moon cycle. The broader message is one of acceptance, celebration, and resistance: a period is just a period, Salazar suggests, but it’s also so much more.”  
—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

★ “Salazar’s use of verse in this story adds a layer of raw emotion and honesty that makes the reading experience all the more poignant. . . . Salazar handles this story with beauty and grace, giving young girls a picture of what it means to stand in your own power and reclaim your own story.”  
—*BookPage*, starred review

“This story is told in beautiful poems. . . . A lovely, relatable story. . . . The author reveals cultural aspects of Latinx (especially Xicana) and Caribbean peoples in rich detail.”  
—*Booklist*

“Lyrical. . . . The characters leap to life and eloquently evoke the passion and pain of a girl’s coming-of-age. Absolutely beautiful, reverent, and intensely personal.”  
—*School Library Connection*

“This is a fascinating tale that blends ancestral traditions from two cultures, while portraying modern dilemmas. Salazar’s poetry is as lovely and graceful as the dance scenes.”

—Margarita Engle, National Young People’s Poet Laureate and  
Newbery Honor-winning author of *The Surrender Tree*

“With conga-pulsed lyrics, Aida Salazar pulls us into the coming of age of eleven year Celi. She initiates readers into the conversation of Bomba, the girl-woman circle, divine twin energies and the many moon-tide powers of a Latina pre-teen. This is a book whose form and content, vision and depth, I find revolutionary and culturally ecstatic. In these times, here is the liberation verse our youth and all have been waiting for—Brava-Bravo!” —Juan Felipe Herrera, former US Poet Laureate and author of *Jabberwalking*

“Aida Salazar has reached deep into our indigenous past to explore in beautiful, poignant poetry what it means to become a woman at the intersection of community and self. Rooted in ancestral lore yet vibrantly modern, *The Moon Within* is a touching, powerful, and important novel in verse.” —David Bowles, Pura Belpré Honor-winning author of *They Call Me Güero*

“In a vivid, magical debut, Aida Salazar’s lyrical poetry deftly pulls you into Celi’s vibrant world as she reluctantly dances towards womanhood, adjusting to the drumbeats of first love and true friendship while exploring her ancestral roots as she finds her role within family and community.” —Naheed H. Senzai, award-winning author of *Shooting Kabul* and *Escape from Aleppo*

“Lovely and amazing . . . a heartbreaker, in every wonderful way. Salazar’s vivid and accessible verse brings us the coming-of-age story we’ve been longing for. Poignant, funny, and deeply moving, *The Moon Within* is a story told with an abundance of love and respect—a gift straight from the center of Salazar’s heart to readers everywhere.” —Olugbemisola Rhuday-Perkovich, author of *Eighth-Grade Superzero* and co-author of *Naomis Too*





# LAND OF THE CRANES



BY AIDA SALAZAR

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For my Bella Mami,  
Maria Isabel Viramontes Salazar,  
in her eternal flight

My papi says,  
*Long ago, our people came from a place  
called Aztlán, the land of the cranes  
which is now known as the Southwestern US.  
They left Aztlán to fulfill their prophecy:  
to build a great city  
in the navel of the universe  
a small mound in the middle of a lake  
where they saw an eagle devour a serpent on a cactus.  
They called that place Mexica-Tenochtitlán.  
It was also prophesized  
our people would return to Aztlán  
to live among the cranes again.*

A black and white illustration of a landscape. In the foreground, a diamond-patterned metal fence runs across the bottom. Behind the fence, a large, dark mountain range is visible. The sky is filled with several birds in flight, including a large eagle on the left and a smaller bird on the right. The word "Aztlán" is written in a stylized, handwritten font in the center of the image.

# Aztlán



## A SOFT MEMORY

I don't remember the mountain  
    where I was born  
or the place where I first crawled.

I remember Mami's worried mouth  
a whisper that she, Papi, and I  
    would follow  
a flock of cranes going  
home  
    El Norte, Los Angeles.

There, we could be birds too—brown grullas  
where bad men could not harm us  
like they did my Tío Pedro  
and Abuelita would not worry.

Seven years later  
I think I remember the soft wrinkles  
on Abuelita Lola's face.

## WHAT I KNOW:

I know my school's shiny floors  
a broken water fountain  
and boxed chocolate milk  
I buy for fifty cents.

I know Ms. Martinez  
and her  
happy handshakes  
at her door  
before each fourth-grade morning.

I know how to write  
and draw the picture poems  
Ms. Martinez taught us  
to paint our feelings.

I know to never forget  
to scribble my name and date  
on the bottom.

I know recess on the blacktop  
and the length of my golden  
brown crane wings  
in the desert sun.

I know my BFF, Amparo  
climbs los columpios like wind.

I know aftercare until six p.m.  
when Papi comes to get me  
    between  
        his two jobs  
and carries me home  
    on his  
strong shoulders  
    so high I find  
            flight.

# HOW I LEARNED TO FLY

Blue sky flight  
began  
with a ripple  
of feathers  
tickled by air  
on the surface  
of my dancing arms.

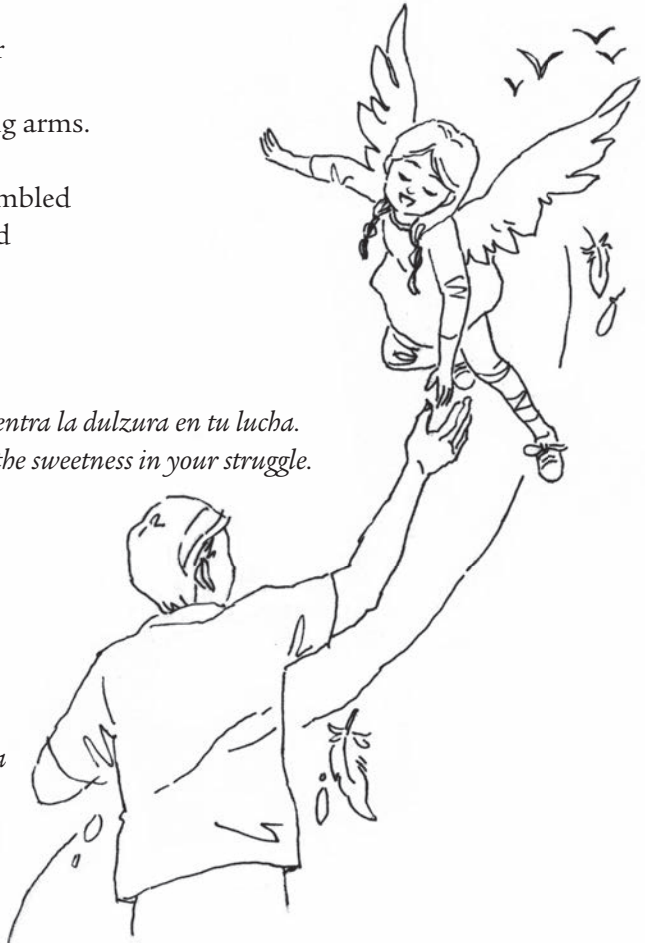
Sprouting wings stumbled  
with the wind  
pushed sideways  
at first

I heard  
Papi's voice,

*Encuentra la dulzura en tu lucha.  
Find the sweetness in your struggle.*

Then, a breath  
a thought  
to spell  
my smiling name  
with my wings  
big circles to form  
*Roberta, Betita*  
my name like Papi's  
*Roberto, Beto.*

Then, a glide  
a laugh so loud



looked down to see  
las casas, las yardas,  
and barking dogs  
of our vecindad  
become tiny  
dots and squares  
as I floated  
above

with Papi flying beside me  
ready to catch me  
all the way home.

## WHERE WE LAND

Papi and I land  
on the front yarda  
of our duplex  
each day.

He shuffles in his pocket  
for the keys to our rental  
and in we go  
to our one-bedroom casita  
plus the laundry room  
he turned  
into a mini bedroom  
with all-year Xmas lights  
for me.

He puts down his so heavy  
worker's belt inside his cool gray  
toolbox and fires up the comal.  
We sit to eat beans and tortillas,  
chile, with a sprinkle of cheese.

This is when he tells me  
old stories about how we come  
from the  
people of the sun  
and how long ago  
we lived in Aztlán  
among the cranes  
and danced

and crooned like trumpets  
about how we left  
and built our great city  
in the belly button of the universe.

He talks with cheeks full of food  
from the side of his mouth,

*The prophecy says*

*one day  
we will fly back home  
and croon, cry, and build  
our nests in the place  
we once left.*

He says all of us cranes  
are giving the prophecy life.

Then, he goes to curl into a nap  
for half an hour while I fly  
outside to play

with Amparo  
in the tree-filled yarda  
we share with her family  
until  
brown feathered-skin Mami  
comes home  
sometimes with  
a bag of bright yellow lemons  
like a gift in her tired hands  
singing  
a sweet song in Spanish  
a swing  
from her lips

and we crowd into  
    one another  
    with kisses  
    and hugs  
and how-was-your-days  
    before Papi rushes off  
to dip his hands  
    in suds  
to make restaurant dishes  
    clean.



## CRANE POEM GALLERY

Before his nap today

Papi asks to see

my daily picture poem.

I pull it out from my backpack

and uncrumple the edges.

*What marvel did you make today, Betita?*

he asks in his Spanish-sounding English

warm soft round words

are air to me

but so strange to others they call it an accent

different, a little, from my own singsong East LA English

Principal Brown tries

to correct

but Ms. Martinez

never cared

one speck

about.

Papi smooths the edges

raises the paper up to the light

to inspect it like an X-ray

studying first the drawing

with a wheel-like twist of his mouth.

He sees:

me perched up on the rocket tower

of our jungle gym at school

my eyes closed

wings out to my sides

the wind drawing

a wide grin across my face.  
Then he reads the rhyming poem I scribbled below my picture:

Recess

Running, sliding, climbing to reach the sky  
up so high, I almost fly.

He traces my signature with his finger.  
It's my best new cursive:

*Betita-September 7*

He kisses his pride right onto  
my cheek with an extra-loving push  
that makes my head wobble.

*You sign just like an artist, mi Plumita.*

I thought maybe like a poet, Papi, I say  
because Ms. Martinez just taught us about  
Juan Felipe Herrera, the poet of the nation  
who is a crane like us.

*Yes, like a poet too, amor.*

I watch him hang  
my crane poem

on what Mami calls

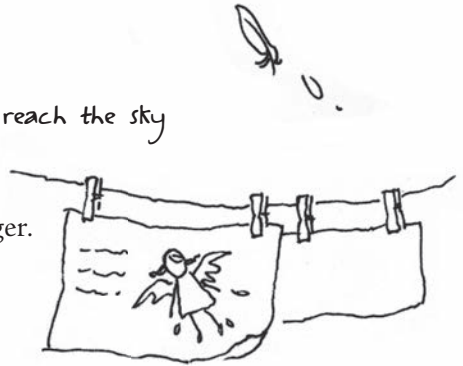
my "laundry line gallery"

she strung up across

the kitchen window

above the sink

while she whistled.



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