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# The Conversation I Always Have

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*Lori Vermaas*

THE CONVERSATION I ALWAYS HAVE

My mother's family has told me  
that I remind them of their mother, Maria.  
I was too young to know her,  
although I witnessed her funeral  
in a dusty backroads  
cemetery in Mercedes, TX

She seems far, very far away now  
but my family tells stories  
she once danced with the governor of Nuevo León  
and belonged to La Sociedad;  
during the violent swirl that was the Revolution  
she fled with my family from Cerralvo  
and left behind her eldest brother,  
as it turned out, forever  
it was his choice—they didn't just desert him

my aunt blows the dust off  
her mother's old out of tune  
Blue Comet mandolin  
    eight strings  
now resting on her living room piano  
then my mother remembers Maria's spirited version  
of the song, "Mi Capitán,"  
which she often played for her husband of thirty plus years,  
the toughest man my mother says she ever knew,  
never mentioning the physical toll  
of bearing nine children in America  
the years the Valley thinned out her body  
costing her a lung  
costing her a singing voice

I wonder what they see in me  
when they show me her photographs  
I see our resemblance  
across the dust and sepia,  
and wonder if I'm just mocking myself  
with the visual comparison

I mean,  
we may be blood,  
but these are just images  
and old photographs seem empty conversation.