The Properties of Magic

Ray Gonzalez

Augustino learned the properties of magic when he found a broken rosary on the playground and turned it in to Sister Delina. The Sister stared at him without saying a word and took the broken rosary from his outstretched hand. He left her classroom worried that she thought he had broken it. Augustino studied the properties of magic when he went to church alone, knelt before La Virgen de Guadalupe, and lit one candle in the rows of dozens of unlit candles. He prayed, then opened his eyes to find two whole rows of burning candles. He made the sign of the cross and quickly left the church. Augustino was taught the properties of magic when he awoke in the middle of the night to find a headless man standing at the foot of his bed. The man, dressed in an old Army uniform, reached into his empty neck and pulled out a piñata of a donkey like the one Augustino had been given by his parents on his fifth birthday. Gasping for air, Augustino lay back on the bed and wanted to scream. He stayed calm, then peered out from the blankets. There was no one there. Augustino contemplated the properties of magic the day the sparrow flew into his room and touched all four corners with a rapid fluttering of wings. When Augustino looked up from doing his homework at his desk, the sparrow hovered over a drawing of a river and mountain he’d colored in school that day. Augustino stood and waved his arms and the sparrow found its way out the window. Augustino realized the properties of magic when he went to shut the window and found two ants carrying a dead honeybee across the sill. He bent down and watched the struggling insects move the heavy bee inch by inch. He let them cross, until a breeze from the open window blew the ants and their meal over the ledge and outside. Augustino believed in the properties of magic when his parents screamed at each other and his father left one night, never to return. For the first two weeks his father was gone, Augustino waited on the porch, rocking quietly on the old, white swing. His father never returned. Late one night, near the end of the two weeks of waiting, Augustino watched from the swing as a blue light hovered in the alley across the street. At first, he thought it was the headlights from a car moving between the houses, perhaps his father’s. As he stopped swinging and stared, the blue light traced patterns on the adobe walls, lifted high above the dark houses, and came straight at Augustino. Before he could react, the blue light exploded in front of his eyes like a Fourth of July sparkler, then disappeared. Augustino used the properties of magic when he rose from the swing, bent down and picked up the broken rosary he spotted on the ground. He cupped it in his hands. Augustino pressed harder to feel the warmth and thought he heard his father’s voice down the street. When his mother called to him to come inside, Augustino placed the mended rosary in his pocket and opened the screen door for the last time that night.