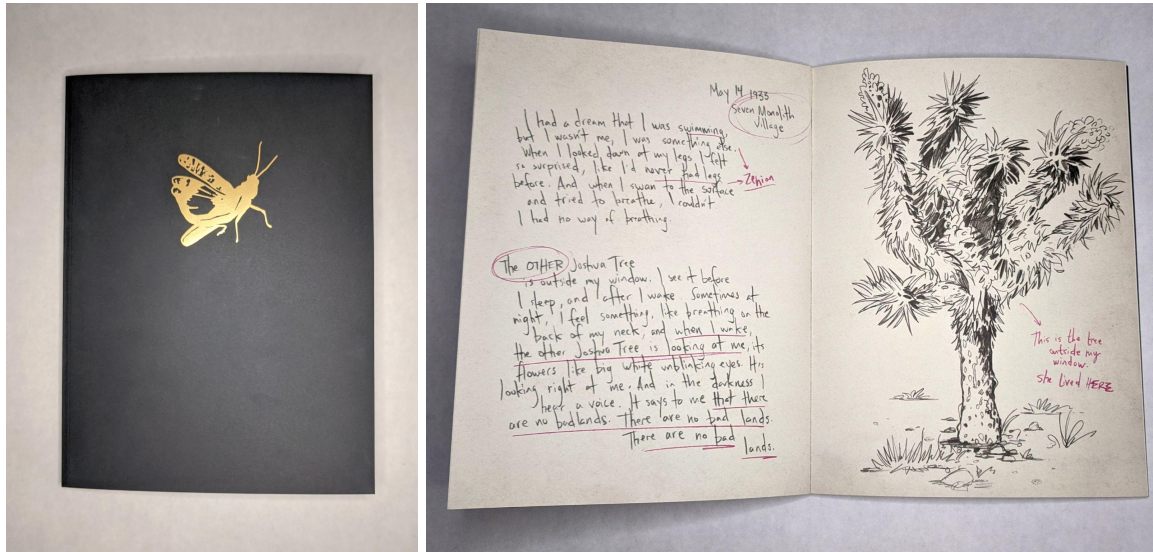


Rose's Herbalism Book
Part 1 - Asunción Velázquez



[bottom of page] Asunción Velázquez, started summer 1931, when you think of me, call me Sun

July 1, 1931, Canadian, Texas [Spot to half page illustration of smoke-on-the-prairie (*Euphorbia marginata*)]

The black dusts have come. Mamacita says there's an old disease that hides in the dust and awakens when the rains dry up. She says mama and papa haven't said so yet, but we're leaving, not just Canadian, but Texas. All of us, nearly the whole neighborhood. Antonio and León are excited, but they are too young to understand what this means for them. They don't understand that we won't be coming back.

Smoke-on-the-prairie. Nothing-on-the-prairie. The dust has destroyed everything. Green with white leaves. Poisonous. Bad for cattle and horses. Good for feeding to your two little brothers who know nothing about anything. Mamacita says nothing is a constant. We're leaving Texas soon. I asked papa if we were going to California, to meet up with our friends who have already left. He said no.

July 14, Canadian, Texas [Spot to half page illustration of green milkweed (*Asclepias viridis*)]

There used to be flowers that would bring the monarch butterflies to the prairie on their way to México. Green milkweed. I think about the butterflies a lot, now. I try to see us in them. Fleeing weather. On a journey. They go back, though. We won't be coming back.

I want to say goodbye. To our home, to Canadian, to the prairie. But there's nothing left to say goodbye to.

July 27, Somewhere outside Albuquerque, New Mexico [Spot to half page illustration of juniper]

The land around us is changing, growing bigger, vibrating with unfamiliar life. Nuevo México, the map says. New. Everything is new now. In a week I will be 18, a new person, supposedly grown. Mamacita is coughing. She hasn't stopped since we left Texas. The old disease.

She showed me how to make a tea out of the berries of the little gnarled juniper trees that are everywhere here. She says they will help her cough. I watched her drink it, and then still cough afterward. This place is strange. There's a strange magic in everything. We're just passing through.

August 2, Grants, New Mexico [Spot to half page illustration of ephedra]

The ground is covered in sharp black stones that destroy everything that touches them. They rise up from the ground and fall back down, like black waves. The people here call this *el malpais*. The badlands. How can a land be bad? Antonio and León found a cave, a black mouth in the black waves. They tried to get me to follow them in, but I wouldn't.

Bright green shoots of ephedra grow here in the badlands. Chewing it makes my mouth numb, and makes me feel restless. Good for long days that follow long nights. I made a tea out of it,

for Mamacita. But she was looking at the black mouth with a similar darkness in her eyes, and she didn't drink it.

Antonio and León have been swallowed by the black mouth. They aren't coming back. Mama is screaming.

August 13, Show Low, Arizona [Spot to half page illustration of banana yucca]

I haven't slept since we left Texas. My face burns like I've been crying. My eyes are heavy with tears that won't come. I feel as dry as this desert. Everything here is sharp. Red. Strange things grow upward like pipes on an organ.

I ate the seed pods of the banana yucca. Not like a banana. The people here say you can make shoes out of the leaves. They say you can survive a winter with just this plant. I can't imagine winter here. I can't imagine.

August 20, Somewhere in Arizona [Spot to half page illustration of saguaros]

The car broke down. It was so hot, I thought we'd die. I heard papa talking to somebody, a voice I didn't recognize, and when I looked, this stranger, this man, put his hands in the car and it came to life, as though it had never been broken. I looked around and saw no one else, nothing else, no other car, just this man, who refused money from papa and told him about a well in the desert to the north, near 'the meadows,' a well that makes dreams come true. I thought about Antonio and León. I looked at mama and knew she was thinking the same thing. When I looked back, the man was gone.

There are people in this desert, with many arms, all sharp, like statues in the night, like in a nightmare. The saguaro, they're called. The elders of the Sonoran. There are little houses here, *jacals*, made out of their ribs. Their big flowers hide a fruit that can be eaten when you are missing home, or brothers, or the way your life used to be. Their arms reach for something only they can see.

September 1, Searchlight, Nevada [Spot to half page illustration of St. John's Wort]

Homestead is the word papa keeps using. He says that's what we're doing. Making a new home. He says we must find the well. The well by the meadows. He has a look in his eyes all the time now that makes him feel like a stranger. I said to Mamacita that I didn't believe the well was real. She told me to keep faith. Faith in what?

The little yellow flowers here in Nevada are called St. John's Wort, a disgusting name for a beautiful little thing, an earthly image of a saint, like the tiny paintings Mamacita keeps in her pockets. A tea of it makes me feel like everything that has happened hasn't really happened.

I slept a bit last night. I heard Antonio and León, but I couldn't see them. I turned, and saw a shadow, and the shadow said, *One million voices will open the door*. I don't know what this means.

September 5, Las Vegas, Nevada [Spot to half page illustration of Joshua Trees and little glowing flowers]

The desert is changing me.

Every Joshua Tree is saying something different with its shape, an unknown word, a lost translation, a movement mid-dance. Flowers that you can eat, that taste like candy. Messengers. The most beautiful. Bodies that can be spun into rope or baskets. Arms that reach in every direction. I want to be in their arms. I want to be among them forever.

There's something else here. The air is changing. Last night I saw something, something small, perhaps a coin reflecting the moon. It was a flower. A glowing flower. I pulled it from the ground and its roots were glowing, too, and when I pinched its stem, a glowy, milky liquid poured out. I put it on my chapped lips, and on my cracked, bloody knuckles. They've never been softer. When the sun came up, the glow faded. Something is happening.

September 5, Las Vegas, Nevada

The others are staying here. They don't believe in the well.

September 10, Seven Monolith Village [Spot to half page illustration of everycolor creosote]

The well is real.

A new town. A new life. I burned the creosote here that changes color in response to something I can't see. Fire to chase away ghosts. I can sleep again. Mamacita isn't coughing anymore. Antonio and León are still ~~dead~~.

There's something in the ground. And in the sky. And in everything. The smoke-on-the-prairie seeds I brought with me are growing so fast I'm afraid of them. Smoke-on-the-Mojave.

May 14, 1933, Seven Monolith Village [Half to full page illustration of the Other Joshua Tree]

I had a dream that I was swimming, but I wasn't me, I was something else. When I looked down at my legs I felt so surprised, like I'd never had legs before. And when I swam to the surface and tried to breathe, I couldn't. I had no way of breathing.

The Other Joshua Tree is outside my window. I see it before I sleep, and after I wake. Sometimes, at night, I feel something, like breathing on the back of my neck, and when I wake, the other Joshua Tree is looking at me, its flowers like big white unblinking eyes. It's looking right at me. And in the darkness I hear a voice. It says to me, *There are no bad lands. There are no bad lands. There are no bad lands.*