allegory

Like many Mexican children, I cleaned the piedritas out of the uncooked beans before they went into the pot—my meal-prep duty to help my overwhelmed mother as she spun around in the kitchen. The process was simple, but time-consuming: a pile of beans was placed at the edge of the table, I’d hold a bowl just below the edge to drop in the clean pieces, and I’d pick off the debris—dried-up seeds, miniature twigs, tiny stones—all of the undesirable, inedible stowaways. These would be set aside in a pile of their own, to be tossed at the conclusion of the cleaning.

I refused to dispense with my pile of detritus too soon since these were the fruits of my labor, the nuggets mined out of the sack. They were much more interesting than the beans, which huddled in the bowl, boring as clones.

I enjoyed holding up the small stones, especially, admiring the complexity of each shape, its many sharp corners, and the dark beauty of its coat gleaming with the light. If I pressed my thumb and pointing finger together, the stone would vanish, but I could still feel it, embedded there inside my flesh. So small a thing, but it had texture and strength. And sound. When I flicked it on the Formica table it tapped a rhythm the entire way until it leaped off the edge, delighted, it seemed, by its luck, its freedom, and its soloist song.