



*"Sisters," image by Marianne Murdoch*

*CALL ME GIRL*

*I was looking at the flower bed by the front door; "That is the whole", I said. I was looking at a plant with a spread of leaves; it seemed suddenly plain that the flower itself was a part of the earth; that a ring enclosed what was the flower; and that was the real flower; part earth; part flower.*

---Virginia Woolf

*And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.*

---Anais Nin

*Home was where we stayed  
Until we could stay no longer.*

---Catherine Perkins

**Unfettered**

*By Melva Priddy*

A meandering god stepped into silence  
when I was three years old, settled  
and spoke with me inside the dappled edge  
of maples, oaks and cedars across the road.  
Unfettered, I melded  
with dirt, clay, tree trunks and stone.

Doleful and pliant mud, worked from yesterday's rain  
which persisted in widening the gully across the front field,  
we molded into dishes, laid them aside.  
Red clay. Red bowls. Red plates.  
Pinched small lumps, rolled them between thumb  
and fingertips, peas. Placed them in a bowl.

Between each pea a pause, and my companion  
who perhaps had always been with me.  
Then, on haunches and mudded feet,  
we blessed a bowl and ate.

## **The grasshopper, the hawk, and the squash vine**

*By Felice Sea Wyndham*

She sat under the plum tree. Gobs of sap had oozed out of the trunk in spots and dried into clear purplish lumps. This garden behind the wattle and daub washroom was overrun with squash plants. Their vines reached up into the lower branches of the plum tree, cascades of orange trumpet blooms along their lines of growth. She had come to feed Henrietta a fat grasshopper, just caught in the long dark green grass in front of the barn. It squirmed in the space between her hands and she checked to make sure there were no gaps between her fingers through which it could squeeze. She could feel the sharp rasp of its chitin feet in the creases of her palm. After releasing the insect into the hawk's expansive inverted-pyramid cage, she stayed, watching the delicate fierceness of Henrietta's snack: the cock of her head to fix the hopper in sight, the easy glide down from a high perch, the grasping of the bright green body in one claw, the curve of her beak slicing through and tossing back first the insect's head, then the rest of it, thorax, legs.

Sitting on her haunches quietly, unmoving, as she knew the bird preferred, she placed her index finger close to an outstretched tendril of a squash runner, touching its light greenness, the underbelly of its curl. She thinks if she can stay still long enough, the tendril will wrap itself around her finger and hold on. She's not sure she has the patience, but she considers herself to be in training for being still, so she sits there without moving. Henrietta wipes her beak from left to right on the bark of her perch, and from right to left, cleaning off a drop of grasshopper juice and part of a leg, which drops to the bottom of her cage. Invisibly, very slowly, over the next forty minutes her finger is taken into the delicate embrace of the squash tendril. When it had barely wrapped itself around her forefinger she was quietly exultant—she had convinced this plant that she, an ambulatory, unreliable animal, was a good support for its slow growth! Then, unwilling to pry herself free of the light green grasp so long in the making, she felt a flicker of panic. How to get out of this contract? Two of the adults drove up to the house at that moment, tires crunching the gravel, closing their car doors and calling out their hellos. Without even deciding to, she stood up, unceremoniously breaking the grasp of the squash, and walked away from the bird in its cage and the vines covering the ground.

**Float**

*By Wendy Miles*

1.

An open door.  
A child pauses on a step.  
Her head turns, lifts to hear  
her name float above the yard.  
A child is an open door.

The child holds her breath  
at the thought of what it means  
—her name—stills  
to hook it to herself with a bright pin.  
A child is a breath.  
A name is a bright pin.

2.

A low sink. An open window.  
A mother leans at the low sink,  
shirt off, breasts pressed to a towel.  
Barely audible, Oh, she says, it feels so good  
you just can't believe it.  
A daughter is an open window, a folded towel.

Shampoo the scent of ginger.  
Warm water pours from a plastic cup,  
spreads along the mother's pink crown,  
neck, around creases at the backs of ears.  
The daughter breathes in the mother.  
Water dribbles from the chin,  
from the daughter's fingers.

A mother is a low sink, warm water.  
Animal, Animalis: to have breath.  
Love is a plastic cup. Love is a breath.

## House Dolls

*By Salud Mora Carriedo*

housework was everything  
in the world of nena's dolls  
until one day  
came a visitor who talked  
of dolls

stitching wounds  
baking highways  
cooking up bills and rules  
and dishing out  
their revolutions

since then nena's dolls  
have been restless—  
asking questions on  
what's been going on  
beyond their fence

today  
nena dresses up the dolls  
in shirts and pants  
and sends them  
out of the house

## Eagle Girl

By Claire McCabe

We inhale the scent of the stable  
horse sweat, hay, leather,  
incense linking my childhood  
to my daughter's.

She kisses Feather's velvet nose  
as she buckles the bridle.  
The grey gelding shifts his feet,  
accepts the weight of the saddle.

I hoist her up, then lead  
the pair into sunshine.  
We both exclaim at  
the bald eagle overhead.

Here, miles from the bay,  
the raptor soars above our woods,  
graces our day  
with majesty and awe.

*Let's name him, she trills.*  
He spirals higher, a pinpoint.  
*We can't, I say. He's not like Feather.*  
*He'll never wear a bridle or do our bidding.*

The raptor vanishes into the blue swath of sky,  
guarding his fragile freedom.  
*I'll call him eagle, then. She pauses.*  
*And please, just call me girl.*

## Kittens

By Chloe DeFilippis

The last time my sister hopped the fence to get a ball from our neighbor's yard, one of the kittens we'd been tracking was dead. Its black furred body was deflated. White foam crusted at the edges of its mouth. Mama told us to stay away from those cats—that their constant hissing meant rabies. We didn't listen. We weren't supposed to hop the fence either. When our old neighbors moved, we were forbidden from that backyard, where weeds grew as tall as our garage. We weren't even allowed to ring the doorbell. Mama warned, *The same man never comes out twice*. I didn't know what she meant.

Victoria never got the ball. The surviving kittens, their mama rushed her. Victoria ran fast, pushed herself over the wooden fence, and landed on our picnic table, panting. She looked at me, dark brown eyes wide: *Ma was right*.

For the next month, we watched more kittens die, on the same patch of concrete where they were born. The new neighbors let the bodies rot until Mama had enough and called animal control. A man with gloves came with a black garbage bag. I wasn't allowed to watch as he took them all away.



## **Space Invaders**

*By Roxanna Bennett*

Childhood: recurring UFO's illuminated her nights, ladders swung from stratospheric heights, detached manner of the doctors who sliced and examined her small parts, cataloguing ribs, spine, clavicle, femurs in their labelled containers, cubed the meatier bits, murmured over their findings before the cure and connect, numb reconstruct, then the body's transfer to the bed miles below. She always woke up tender but whole. Years later she watched cinema aliens plunder an abductee with crude three fingered tools, the actor's Oscar nominated scream of wide mouthed terror foreign to her own dim memory of the operating chamber. Disturbed she conferred with her medical practitioner who gently referred her to a licensed counsellor trained to erase the layers of lies the brain's projectors play behind the eyes, the clever mind protector of the wordless young who storyboard horror they can't comprehend, recast uncles, fathers, as characters, kindly doctors, space invaders; they never meant to leave these permanent scars.

**Someone Blundered—**  
*By Leonore Hildebrandt*

*For nothing was simply one thing.*  
Virginia Woolf

While father paces and declares,  
mother takes a moment by the window.  
In her own room, the girl finds  
that words are emboldened  
by the sounds of waves—  
*the other Lighthouse was true too.*

Here the picture wants a daub—  
perhaps this time it is their boat.  
The girl is bent over its bow,  
looking into the water's turquoise depths,  
the rockweed swaying, effortless—  
it is one way of knowing.

Later her words will touch the shores  
of those who blundered—  
those who used them for money,  
failed to think and feel before writing them into laws,  
locked them into dictionaries  
where they don't live.

**Solitary Prism**

By Kathleen Hellen

—at the House of Inscriptions, Little Moreton Hall, Aug. 3, 1649

in this custom of the bride—a girl The beautiful gardens  
encircling The trefoils and the quatrefoils as  
rings inside of rings The long gallery where the Queen herself had danced

The magnificent bay where panes were scored on upper-storey windows  
The “a” looks like an “o”

As though her hand had wavered at the window A girl  
no more than fourteen, with skills to read A girl  
served up like tea in curtained rooms to the avuncular  
To games of noughts and crosses

gambled Who she was before she  
signed as Margaret, *Mrs.*, as daughter of the house was still unsure::  
*“man can noe more know,  
womens myndes by tears, than by her  
shadow judge what clothes shee weares”*

As though the diamond she had used was  
ballast weight  
The scratch on glass less autograph

### **Three-Legged Foal**

*By Yania Padilla Sierra*

Who built this pen I am kept in?  
Stark and sterile, no tender grass  
For my tender mouth.  
No sweet bales to lie on.  
Run I would, if walk could I.  
I am a three-legged foal.

In the amniotic ocean  
A lovely cinder Venus was I,  
'til Father cracked his whip, splitting the mare  
And in so doing was I.  
Mare a gnashing Fury in her anguish.  
I proffered my leg-Mother, maim I.

Now hobbled and lamed  
from aery to root  
An unclean spirit am I.  
Oh Father, pray for  
The insatiable monster, I.

For I will not eat grass but men heavier of foot more broken than I  
Open the paddock unlock the gate run from the whips that their brute hands would hold  
Break necks break spirits  
like promises like love

I am cobbled together  
by so many sins,  
Like so many since.

Lathered and wild-eyed,  
Remembered the Way have I.

I am the three-legged foal.

**The Gift of Veneer**

*By Melva Sue Priddy*

-after Li-Young Lee

To keep me facing the hole in the veneered door  
hung just that week in our two year old bathroom  
where none had hung before, he sat on the side of the bed  
and pulled me between his legs. Had you entered, then,  
you would have thought you saw a man who cared.

“You see that door. You see that hole.” I was transfixed  
his voice so unexpectedly careful; I looked into his brown eyes.  
I had cried for hours, my list of chores forgotten.  
I’d already heard everything, anticipated the yelling,  
the whipping, the money taken from my milk check.  
My sister had locked the door and refused to come out,  
my foot crushed through on the second kick.  
I wanted the whipping—just hush and get it over with.

“Some day you will have a house  
with a nice bathroom door.  
He pointed. I cried anew.  
And I will come visit you.  
And do you know what I am gonna do.  
I’m gonna kick a hole in your door.  
Do you understand me.”

No spanking, no money taken.  
Never replaced, the door hung wounded.  
His words followed me every move,  
apartment, house, and every mistake  
the rest of my life. I studied each  
bathroom door thinking, in the end,  
how brittle veneer can be.

## **La Guapa**

*By Marianela Medrano*

No one has ever seen a Ciguapa, but Grandma and Grandpa told me the story so many times that it became reality. Tia Ceci, Mami and Papi, told it to me so many times that it got recorded in my cells the way important things are recorded. If you don't believe me, ask Nelly. She also heard the same story. The two of us listened as if there was nothing else to do in the world but to sit down and listen.

Nelly and I have seen the Ciguapa. The first time, we were playing under the thatch eaves of our house, gathering goat droppings to make a stew. We collected the animal pellets for cooking in the clay pots we made with Mami. We walked around bent with a cupped hand and the other picking up the droppings as if they were treasures. At that time Mattel did not exist in our world, nor had the furor of plastic touched us. We made believe that the pellets were beans that we cooked together with the white flowers of Yerba Amarga we used as rice. That was before Mami let us use the colorful seeds of the annatto and the morsels clinging to the pot after the rice was cleaned for the main meal. She was standing there looking at us with a smile on her face.

The girl with feet pointing backwards and long hair covering her naked body stared at us with eyes so black they seemed bottomless. Her feet left footprints into which Nelly and I stepped with ours. Since that day, every evening we would go in pursuit of Ciguapa's tracks. It was a time when we were amused by everything—unlike now when we are so different and we don't know what to say to each other anymore. Now that Miami's heat and New England's cold separate us, we hardly recognize each other.

The Ciguapa, moody and sullen, could turn anyone who looked into her eyes into stone, except Nelly and me. La Guapa looked at us with sad eyes and instead of turning us into stone she made us more human. We used to leave the two-pane window open to cool down the room after it was baked in the sun all day. She began to appear in our window. That's how we lost the fear of the night and the spirits of the dead we imagined lurking in the shadows.

In the darkness Nelly and I used to look through the open window, looking for lights or spirits of dead *jupías*, which according to Mami cross the dark edge of the night. Every time a light appeared we used to shout together, "Who's there? Show your navel right now!" We knew that if it was the spirit of the dead it would run because they have no navels. At least that's what Mami told us. We knew that the Ciguapa was not dead because she parted her long hair covering her naked body and showed us her navel. Nelly and I would stare in shock and then go back to sleep saying the beads of the rosary in our hands to ward off evil spirits and keep bringing *la Ciguapa* back.

Nelly and I realized that *Seño Laura* was a Ciguapa long before what happened happened. *Seño Laura*'s eyes changed forever after her husband ran away with a young girl from *El Cayal*. *La Seño Laura* was skinny and taught us to write letters in perfect form, but sometimes in the middle of class her eyes would travel far, become sad and empty; I looked at her and I too would be sad. Later I told Nelly about her and she too began to get sad when she looked at *La Seño*'s eyes.

*La Seño Laura* turned into a Ciguapa way before the girl from *El Cayal*. The first time her eyes took on that power which turned everyone into stone, except Nelly and me, was after her husband fooled around with *Fefa*, the *bachatera* who sang in the club at the end of the evening. *Fefa* was tall and wore colored wigs and perfumes that enchanted men. *Fefa* played the accordion as a goddess and inflamed the audience with her *perico ripiao* about betrayal and pleasure. I have forgotten the lyrics of her songs, but I do remember very well the musty smell of bats in the club where we did the *veladas*. I loved to hide behind the curtain to see *Fefa* shine on stage lit by kerosene lamps.

My sisters got the shows ready at the club. Nelly always played the role of the weeping woman in the dramas. In one of them she played the wounded woman who recited a list of names of others with whom her boyfriend had betrayed her. In the end, Nelly fell to the floorboards and died of grief by saying the name of Petra, "the most evil of all," as the last line called for. The curtain came down and Nelly would come back to life. It was the last show we did before we moved to the city, when Nelly wrote the drama about the names of women. She wrote it right before she learned to look at the sadness in the eyes of La Seño.

La Seño Laura used to strip in the middle of class causing a commotion and we would gather around her to give her cover. Her eyes became sadder and darker. La Seño had long black hair, the blackest in the village. She looked like an Indian, with soft skin, the color of honey. The second time she had a fit and suffered a patatú, she was suspended from school, before we even learned to write properly.

After that we got used to the heckling voices on the road following the thin body of Seño, covered only by her jet black hair, not as bright as before, because after the girl from el Cayal came and left with Seño's husband she did not bathe or eat or sleep.

Over time the boys fell into following her as entertainment shouting all the way "Crazy Ciguapa that went to Moca and left her children eating mocas!" The last time we saw her she was on her way to the lagoon, followed by the group of boys pelting her with stones, shouting, "Crazy Ciguapa who went to Moca!" Nelly and I could not keep quiet and went after the boys. When our backs were turned to the lagoon we missed seeing Seño Laura slipping into the depths. As we turned, Nelly and I found the tips of her feet pointing out while her body was sinking to the bottom.

At night a luminous figure used to emerge from the lagoon and come to our window. Nelly and I would not ask her to show us her navel because we knew she was not a Jupia but a Ciguapa Guapa.

**Glossary:**

**Ciguapa** is a mythic creature of Dominican folklore, with feet pointing backwards and long hair covering her naked body.

**Guapa** means brave and its also a nickname for Ciguapa.

**Mattel** is a toy brand popular in the Dominican Republic

**Yerba Amarga:** A common herb in the Dominican Republic.

**Jupía:** Spirit of the dead for the taino people.

**El Cayal:** Name of a rural town in Northwest of Dominican Republic.

**Perico Ripiao:** The oldest version of the Dominican Merengue genre.

**Veladas:** Pageants

**Bachatera:** A singer of Bachata music.

**Moca:** Name of a town. Moca, is also used here in a colloquial way for Mosca (fly). The line is from a children's song used to tease a mad person.

**Sunday Morning**

*By Jeanne Bryner*

Mama stands blotting her red lipstick  
and the tired Bible waits on our gray  
kitchen table. We have a nickel

for the collection plate. We whine  
because Ben gets to carry the nickel.  
*Ben will drop it*, we say. Mama is firm.  
We wear strawberry pink dresses, the boys wear  
blue sailor suits. Bacon grease is Mama's scent.

Nancy scrapes cornmeal mush into Sam's bowl,  
he gulps. Glass lies broken in the trash  
and blood stains dry on our green couch.  
Sunday morning means the end of Saturday night  
pain. Mama buttons her aqua seersucker skirt.  
She glides like a wave from the ocean,  
presses tan make-up over her left shiner,  
and her ice bag sweats on the toilet.

My Mama sings softly beneath her wide-brimmed  
straw hat, *Oh come to the church in the wildwood*.  
Mrs. Harvey points at my Mama, and the brown suit  
preacher pounds his Methodist pulpit  
screaming about hell's fury. . . .

My Mama's hair shines, the color of honey.  
She quiets my brothers. My Mama's pancake make-up  
melts from all this talk of hell.  
Her left eye's a slit under a purple avalanche,  
and purple is the color for the church,  
the color for royalty.



**My Father on His Deathbed**

*By Cynthia Robinson Young*

...except he didn't have one.  
His deathbed was an alley street,  
far away from comfort.  
He was abandoned,  
lonely,  
confused, staring at a  
needle he had anchored into his arm,  
not meaning to draw his life out. Staring into streetlights  
until they become stars, he  
wonders what will happen next  
In a world he believed he created with his family, and now  
believes  
the drugs have destroyed.

I, on my twin bed,  
across from my sister,  
hear the doorbell ring at four in the morning,  
see it is still dark as the night before,  
recognize even then  
the sound of the insistent knock  
of Death's Messenger.

My mother, in her empty marital bed,  
reaches out  
to no one, then awakens  
to grief  
and an expectancy of  
this visit,  
these policemen,  
this news,  
this ending  
that was always on its way to  
our doorstep.

## **Sweater Girl**

By Darlene Taylor

I rocked my knees, trying not to pee on myself. Thunder rattled the basement windows. Rain seeped through cracks, glistening on the wall like wet glue. I crossed my legs, uncrossed them, and crossed them again. Unable to hold it any longer, I stood.

Girl, Mama said.

I need the bathroom, I said. It was a good excuse. When the lady at the Woolworth counter in Richmond said toilets were for Whites only, I heard Mama say children can't hold their fluids.

I let my eyes drop and bent my head like at the church altar.

Sit down, Mama said. Lord doing his work.

I flopped into the chair beside my brother Todd. A blast of thunder knocked at the windowpane. I covered my ears, and asked, what's he working on?

Irritated, Mama pointed to the bathroom.

I ran in case she changed her mind and did my business quick. When I returned to the room, Mama's head was down, her hands rested one across the other in her lap, palms upwards as if holding a communion wafer. The overhead light shone on mama's pressed hair. A curl pulled away from her temple as if it were too tired to hold its place. Occasionally her head jerked up.

Todd rolled a toy tractor back and forth across his knees, puffing his cheeks out in play. As soon as I sat, Todd tossed the truck to me.

Devil child, Mama said to me.

I'm sorry, I said to Todd, Mama, and God. Silently I asked God to put it in Mama's heart to buy me the new sweater I wanted.

Hissing, his eyelids folded back, and top teeth exposed like a vampire, Todd teased me.

Mamma's quick hand squeezed his knee. I knew that hold. He wouldn't move again. Not until the storm ended.

You think I don't see you? Mama asked.

I knew Mama saw things even when she wasn't there. She said children needed watching. So, God watched and told her everything. God was everywhere.

Wind whipped outside the window; God's whisper. God, I whispered back, I need a sweater. Pink like Santa's cheeks. A pretty pink sweater to wear to school. Pink, fastened with pearl buttons like the ones the white girls wore. If I had a pretty pink sweater, they wouldn't make fun of my clothes and wouldn't call me mean names.

I watched the window and listened, my arms crossed my chest, warming me. If I'm good, if I'm good, maybe I can have that sweater.

## Angels and Saints

By Chloe DeFilippis

She kissed her hand then placed it on the foot of a saint. She lit a votive candle. I did the same. On either side of St. Michael's Church were tall, plaster statues of Jesus, Mary, and the saints. As a little girl, I thought they'd come to life. I thought this trick—kissing the foot, lighting the candle—meant what my mother told me: *If you pray to a saint, they'll listen*. I thought this was *especially* true if the church was empty. We didn't attend mass, but after CCD, my mother whispered, "Let's sneak in for a second." In unison, we dipped our fingers in holy water, crossed ourselves, and tiptoed past the pews to our saints. During my early childhood, those somber-faced beings seemed to belong to us, as if our secret prayers solidified a sacred bond, one that was strong enough to make my mother tear as she rose from her knees. I believed in angels more than I believed in God then. I believed they were in the speckles of sunlight that shone through the stained glass windows. And I believed they could tell me what was wrong, what the saints were saying that made my mother cry.

**Spring**

*By Chloe Honum*

Mother tried to take her life.  
The icicles thawed.  
The house, a wet coat  
we couldn't put back on.

Still, the garden quickened,  
the fields were firm.  
Birds flew from the woods'  
fingertips. Among the petals

and sticks and browning fruit,  
we sat in the grass and  
bickered, chained daisies, prayed.  
All that falls is caught. Unless

it doesn't stop, like moonlight,  
which has no pace to speak of,  
falling through the cedar limbs,  
falling through the rock.

## In a Shark's Mouth

By Nicole Lacy

Someone once told me about the man-eating muskies in Lake Erie. Someone else swore there were snapping turtles big enough to take off toes and fingers. I stopped swimming, even though Grandma assured me that the stories of pikes picking off Great Lakes waders were myths. But because I was a curious girl, it wasn't long before I learned about the bull shark, which can swim from the ocean and into a river, squeezing itself into a narrow creek bed, because it knows that children are an easy meal.

What is a myth? It is the lie that hides a vicious fact.

Once, on a Sunday afternoon, my mother took me to the natural history museum. We saw the skeletons of giant fish containing smaller skeletons in their see-through bellies. There were fish with fanged underbites that could have gutted entire ships. I stood in front of the fossilized jaw of a megalodon, its body longer than two school buses. One of its teeth was bigger than my mother's whole hand.

A megalodon could have swallowed a great white, even *Jaws*. Against Grandma's advice, I watched *Jaws* over and over. In time, I memorized the details of each attack and no longer covered my eyes when children were eaten. I watched *Jaws* until my brain grew serrated teeth of its own.

Saturated with facts, the ground dissolved underneath me. I was alone in the ocean while a shark sliced through the depths, preparing a fatal strike from below.

Some nights before bed, a plastic shark swam circles around me in my bath, its dorsal fin surfacing briefly before disappearing under the bubbles. When it went in for the kill, I clamped its teeth onto my flesh until fear surged through my body, and I had to pull the plug from the drain.

Someone once gave me a pop-out poster for *Jaws* that leapt when unfolded. I closed it against my face, feeling the cardboard teeth sink into my skin. I imagined being dragged underneath the ocean in a shark's mouth. I still wonder what it would be like to die in this way—suffocated and torn apart all at once.

Sharks wander dark water without fearing for their lives, and never shed tears when their mothers disappear. I set out to become one, absolute in my indifference. But I'm adrift in this ocean, waiting, as shadows move underneath.

What is a fact? It is the secret a grandmother keeps, or a silhouette underwater. It is something as real as the tooth of a megalodon—or my mother, waving goodbye after our trip to the natural history museum, once, on a Sunday afternoon.

**The Difference Between a Child and Offspring**

*By Melva Sue Priddy*

The muddy-hoofed sow farrows  
on her side, fastened in the log pen,  
a wooden gate shoved up to fasten her in.  
She heaves and grunts. "Climb in,"  
he orders and I slip to the ground beside her.  
If she tried, she couldn't see her other end,  
the swollen vulva swollen.  
And they will birth from that end,  
this year's litter. "She'll eat them all,"  
he says. "Take this feed sack and swipe  
each pig's snout so it can breath  
then tip it in to nurse."

Her many pink tipped teats engorge  
in two rows pointing toward me.  
Into my left hand he shoves a tobacco stick

then leaves for another chore. I look at the space  
above the sow; no room to swing should she turn  
on me, white skinned and pig scented.

**Tulip Girl**

*By Michel Wing*

They said, *Ignore her.*  
*Shut the door. Give up this hunt.*  
What matters, one pebble in a wall of stone,  
one cry in a torrent of sound?

But tulip girl, I see you, dark tips skirted round,  
your bruised petals dancing in night.  
No matter how cold the garden, cruel the hoe,  
there you are, glory, spark, shine.

**Ordinary Sophie**

*By Karen Heuler*

I don't need to stand out in a crowd.

The others do, of course; they want to be special. No one who "wants" to be special is special. The special want something specific.

I find wanting to be repulsive; the neediness drags people down, puts weights on their legs; they can't get free of it.

I exist; I touch things; I move on.

I am 16 and no one else in my family is 16 right now; I have them all beat.

My sister Rita wants too much and she gets it; that may be the only flaw in my argument; people who want things shouldn't get them because it's crass and ugly. I am a Marxist; everything equally. Love and affection, too, given out in a specific dosage so no one is left wondering what to do with this excess of affection thrown my way, not that anyone throws it my way. And I'm grateful for that. It's best to wait for someone else to step forward because then you're not attached, and all these attachments degrade people, make them look at themselves all the time, which is what Rita does, collecting mirrors and bright new shoes that click on the floor so everyone always looks up to see what that noise is. She looks like she's just eaten ice cream, always.

You unwrap these people, taking off their clicking shoes, and there's nothing.



## Safety

By Kimarlee Nguyen

I do not know where I can go.

When I was eleven, I climbed to the top of the concrete shed in the backyard and looked down. The dirt was in a pile a few feet below me but I imagined it as the end of a deep, deep valley. I was wearing a hand-me-down dress from my cousin who is much skinnier than I was (or ever will be) and the elastic waist cut deep into my stomach. I pulled down the straps, knotted twice so that my chest wouldn't show because I already had boobs that was big enough to make all the neighborhood boys next door call me a slut.

I was eleven and already I hated myself.

The day before, I rode my bike for over an hour along the boardwalk of the local beach. I rode fast, faster than the driving by cars with the men with their too loud mouths and all the women who told me, *watch what you eat, watch where you walk, you're already too goddamn fat.*

Two days before that, I got my period for the first time, a deep red rose of blood blossoming all over my yellow shorts and my oldest male cousin pointed and laughed and laughed until Yeiy found out, slapped him upside his head and told him to shut the fuck up. She made me take a long bath and when Ma got home, she told me never to play with the boys at night anymore.

I was eleven, but I could be fifteen, twenty-five, forty and I sat on top of that concrete shed, ankles crossed. I wanted to be flat, flatten all my curves so no one would notice me. I wanted to still be a girl, just like my baby cousin, just six, just a girl screaming and shouting and dancing at night.

I cannot breathe. I walk home from art club or when Yeiy and I take the train home from Chinatown, I carry a razor blade in my pocket, I look around every corner and hope that today is not the day when it happens.

*You are a woman now, they all say. You have to watch everywhere and anywhere.*

Today, I read the news. It is not safe for women, men, old, young, black, yellow, red, straight, gay, poor, rich. It is not safe.

It is not safe and I am holding onto anything because if I look down, there is dirt and it says my name, it says come here, it's the only place where it is safe.

Safe.

I am thirty years old and I am holding on to whatever I can because if I let go, if I try to let go, if they know I am letting go, if letting go is the only way to be safe, then the concrete shed crumbles and headfirst, I am burying myself in the cold, deep dirt.

**Fat Girl**

*By Melissa Grossman*

I carry the weight of being a fat girl.  
I bear the indelible sledgehammer taunts:  
    my brothers call me "tank"  
    people say, "how beautiful" I'd be if I "just lost weight."  
I wear the weight like battle armor, swallow my anger.

I carry the raw egg of my future on a spoon.

**Kitchens**

*By Michel Wing*

Bread cut in thick slabs,  
warmth pooling the butter.

Swirled peaks of meringue,  
the lemon tart, sweet.

Dinners of simple leftovers,  
always enough for one more.

The kitchens of  
childhood friends  
opened wide for me.

I entered hungry  
for mothering,  
left full-bellied,  
whole.

## Driving Home

By Melissa Grossman

She haunts me, this young woman I drove home one evening.  
Wan with hollow cheeks and mussed blond hair that fell over her face,  
she kept me captive in my car, told stories about the room  
she rented in a big house where no one talked to her.  
She stared at a box of Girl Scout cookies on the floor by her feet,  
so I gave her one. Watched her from the corner of my eye,  
hold it to her mouth with both hands, like a mouse.  
We arrived at the house where she lived, and I waited for her  
to open the car door, but she kept talking and talking and talking -  
wanting something from me I was afraid to give.  
A half-hour later, she finally opened the door, then  
turned back to look at me and said *thank you*.  
As she stepped out, I grasped the steering wheel, relieved  
to drive away. A startling knock on the window made me stop.  
She was still there, bending down to say *thank you* again,  
but I knew she was really saying, *please*.

## Downed Limb

*By Karen Skolfield*

The deer's eating an oak limb as if it were a salad  
or something juicier, strawberries with crème fraîche.  
Evidence of early winter's hunger.  
The leaves papery brown, exact color of the deer.  
It looks like it's eating itself, working away  
at its shoulder, not even glancing up.  
When we consume ourselves,  
we think no one cares enough to watch.  
The girl in high school who carved "gypsy"  
into her arm with her own blood font –  
well, everyone had one of those classmates,  
her eyes more drawn each day  
until she vanished and we, her not-really-friends  
from French, would briefly wonder.  
It never occurred to us to express our adolescent  
warblings of compassion or cross into the world  
of adults and ask them to look up.  
Across the road, there's half a deer.  
Just the front half, with no drag marks  
for the back half through the snow.  
Perhaps another doe that began consuming  
herself and couldn't quit. Or she thought  
someone would stop for her, eventually,  
a truck driver with a great big heart.  
He'd call out: Deer, you don't have to do that.  
You've got my attention. I see you. I see you.  
I see you.

**Bouncers**

*By Linda Melick*

Mother made me and brother  
go out to the apple orchard  
to pick up all the bouncers.

The farmer got the good fruit,  
but we could have the leavings.

We dragged them home  
in a beggared wooden barrel  
that reeked of wine.

She would sigh at them  
as she cut the bruises out  
with a small sharp knife.

Then she peeled their skins off  
in one continuous piece.

We snatched up  
these spirals,  
pockmarked arcs  
of red and green,  
we tried to extend them  
on top of the table,  
pressing the loops into lines  
to find who had the longest.

When we got too loud,  
Mother would smack us  
with a stiff rubber spatula  
that she kept by the stove.

I got hit the hardest  
because I was the oldest.  
But I never cried.

I went out to the orchard  
and kicked up the dust.  
Then I made piles of stones  
into pyramids of power,  
which I pitched  
at my brother  
when he came out to find me,

his face full of tears.

## Ethel Finds Money

By Karen Heuler

My adopted sister Ethel sat opposite me at the dinner table, waiting for the food to arrive in the multicolored bowls Mom had gotten long ago, to cheer Ethel up and encourage her to eat. Ethel was humming to herself, kicking her legs back and forth; I could tell because her body rocked rhythmically. She often did it. She picked up her fork, examined it, and put it down. My father came in from the garage, cupped his hand over Ethel's head (she always looked up, grinning) and sat down. There was a paper in his hand, as usual. My mother didn't allow anyone to read at the table, but she was still in the kitchen.

There was salad and bread already on the table, and a container of milk, which I began to study—Gilbert Santiago, aged 2. His hair had been wetted down and parted. He wore a short-sleeved white shirt and clip-on bowtie poking out from between his suspenders. He had probably just stopped crying when the picture was taken.

Mom came in with a platter of meat and a bowl of mashed potatoes, slipping them onto the table, seating herself with satisfaction, flipping open her napkin, and bowing her head. "Grace," she said, her hands clasped together. "Bless us O Lord," she began, prompting us to join her. She heard two voices, not three, and looked over to Ethel, who was unfolding a twenty-dollar bill.

"Where'd you get that?" my mother asked.

"It was in my pocket," she said. It was crinkled beyond her ability to smooth it out, but she kept flattening it with the palm of her hand.

"How did it get in your pocket?" my father asked quietly and I smiled, my head lowered.

Ethel heard something in his tone and frowned with concern. "Is it my birthday?"

"No. It's not your birthday. How did it get in your pocket?"

She looked anxiously from face to face, all of them with serious looks. Even mine was serious. "I don't know," she said. "It was just there." Her mouth began to hang low and a little air of gloom settled on her shoulders. "I found it," she said. "I found it."

"Well," my mother said finally. "People lose money and people find money. You're a lucky little girl." She picked up the platter, moved off a slice of meat, then passed it to my father. "Eat up now." Dinner was quiet, with the twenty-dollar bill settled next to Ethel's plate like a napkin. She left it there after dinner as she went off to her coloring book before bed. I left it there as I cleared the table.



**Mothers**

*By Chloe DeFelippis*

green eyes & her mother's  
television echoing, she's  
learned to sleep on the couch.

greens eyes & her mother's  
brown bags full, she  
collects packets of salt, pepper, ketchup.

green eyes & her mother's  
handwriting on index cards, she  
cries when shredding paper.

green eyes & her mother's  
dead infant daughter, she's  
learned to walk away from  
needy little girls  
sad & alone.

**Tanka for Precious and Angie and Vivian, in Particular**

*By M. Nzadi Keita*

Daffodils name you  
'home of delicate things.' They  
know your yellow mind.  
Pollen trumpets secretly  
nod. Hear them open their throats?

**On Shawano Lake**

*By Lora Keller*

I wrap an orange life jacket around my shoulders  
like a crusty stole. You thread the loose canvas tie  
through the two silver rings at my waist  
and tug it tight, twice. It's my turn,

my one time all year to be alone with you.  
Your sons are still asleep and jealous.  
Your other daughter is afraid of worms.  
Our Evinrude fractures the quiet morning

and soon we stop at the edge of a lily pad acre.  
We float and lure perch from their liquid field.  
I imagine a stroll across the smooth green,  
swaying carpet, sunfish darting

beneath my navy blue Keds, through their foggy  
jungle of shimmying stems. Your reel hums  
and clicks. I flounder for the perfect question  
that would open you to me.

A loon cry echoes. Water softly rubs the aluminum  
dinghy. You cast your line again. The black lead weight  
arcs through the dark, dawn sky and steers the sheer  
fishing line to the pike's cool, still lair. At your feet,

a rusted tackle box sparkles with your arsenal –  
minnows, spinners, spoons. I wait for a splash  
of golden tail, any glance from you,  
even a call to pull anchor.

Your cigar seasons the lake air. I watch the bobber  
at the end of my bamboo pole -- the red half  
submerged, the white half lifted, alert  
to all nibbles.

**Space**

*By Lisa Rosenberg*

My father brought home  
the blue-jacketed,

government-issued  
views of the surface

of the moon. Parsed,  
printed, and bearing

the crosshairs of our optics  
on mottled fields

where illusion made  
bubbles of craters

as we watched; my small  
body tracking

toward a moon-cycle  
still years away. Toward

wings I would seek  
to merit, and a paper

to confirm my degree  
in postulating the deep

workings of a universe  
but not the world

who sings to us first, before  
the logic of reason.

Before speech. Equations  
forged in the engines

of memory. Hot interiors  
of moments that meld

thought to muscle,  
and words to thought.

## **My Father's Coat**

*By Christy O'Callaghan-Leue*

I pull your unwanted Army green dress coat from a box of crap sent home with us and lay it on my bed, bodiless, discarded because it no longer fit. Angry because you spoke to my brother's history class but wouldn't walk five doors down the hall to speak to mine. Typical. I remove the patches one of your wives had lovingly sewn. Airborne Ranger. Special Forces. I cut stitch after tight stitch with my grandmother's tiny foldable scissors.

With each snip, I count the hours squandered over you. The afternoons planted on the side steps, itchy in a church dress, planning discussion topics you'd enjoy, excited for my special day with dad. You not showing up unless my brothers came too. Weekend visits I slept squished on a triple decker bunk bed with three half-sisters in an insignificant room of your military housing. The extra bedroom reserved for your painted soldier collection. My brothers sleeping in the living room so you can wake them early for adventures, while I get left behind. Free childcare to give your sweet, exhausted third wife a break.

Never once a sorry.

My stitches quick and loose, I decorate the coat with buttons and patches my friends and I collected. "Mean People Suck", stuff about the environment, The Misfits, Dead Kennedys, a red ribbon.

The coat is heavy and thick as I pull it over my shoulders. I push perfect gold buttons through perfect holes and hug the lapels together. Breathe in what I guess is your scent, although you never let me close enough to learn it. I stand in front of the mirror at the foot of my bed and turn side to side, admiring my handiwork and smirking at the reactions I anticipate. Your pissed off face. About to call my brothers in to show them...I stop and take off the coat.

I exhale excitement in a jagged breath and inhale dread. I'd be ok with your yelling and screaming, even hitting, at least you'd be paying attention to me, but if you saw how I desecrated your pride it would be worse. Crueler. To you I would no longer exist. Even the slightest scraps of love would vanish.

Damn it.

I swear low enough so no one will hear me. Hating myself for being so stupid. Pathetic. A child yearning for a father. But I know you. I gather your patches into a shoe box and push it under my canopy bed as far back as my fingertips stretch.

My buttons and patches left on your coat, I place it on a hanger, shroud it with its white dry-cleaning bag and hang it at the far end of the bar in my closet. I shove my shirts and jackets in front of it, hiding what I've done from brother's snooping eyes and tattletale mouths.

There it will stay, haunting the closet until my mom sells the house seven years later.

**The Third Thing**

*By Kathleen Kelly*

Grandma Agnes, like me,  
believes all things bad  
come in threes.

My father's recovered  
love of whiskey, Uncle Virgil's  
violet eyes in milky disguise, the May twister churning

at our cellar door. Hinges contorting  
like Comaneci's saltos  
and somersaults.

Grain silos gouged, groaning—  
holding their sides.  
The auger mangled.

Yet her sweet peas  
survive, thrive even, tendrils  
twine in lazy daisy

curlicues--like her precise  
French knots. We shell the peas,  
a colander nestling

between my freckled knees.  
Her legs laced  
with spider veins, calaminated

mosquito bites.  
I don't want  
to disrupt the quiet,

to burden her  
with my trip to the pawn shop, hocking  
her white on blue cameo, or about

the third thing, unintended,  
not yet showing.

**Bonfire Girls**

*By Roxanna Bennett*

My abortion your whatever, iceberg.  
Sometimes boys are ways to mark  
a space with caution tape, identical parks,  
collapsible homes, your bluebird  
this ghost word. We're adrift in an ocean  
of fuck. Your orbit slow motion,  
I am weeks without weather.  
You storm soaked, late, heavy, never  
gaining traction. Stuck, stuck, but sometimes  
hurricanes in mason jars. Blame Mercury  
for summer's dark porches, moth-eaten memory.  
Once kissed but all signs point to planets aligned  
against these floes, moments, the hidden unloved parts.  
Bonfire girls with melted boots and fragile hearts.

## **Trash Day**

*By Therése Halscheid*

This is how it really looked long ago....

This is myself back in time, a girl  
with sallow skin, dragging metal cans to the curb,  
notice how I stand for awhile that far from our house  
watch how my lips, bright as scars, are parting  
open with words so the great air can take them  
out of their mystery --

see how my thoughts form the storms, how the morning sky  
fills with dark sentences

always something about aphasia, his dementia,  
something always about my father caught  
so quiet inside me

that would rise in the wind to become  
something readable.

I am only fourteen. But you can tell I look old  
as if life is ending. Notice how my limbs droop so  
willow-like over the trash, see how the cans  
are all packed with food, know I am starving myself, I am  
that full of my father.

These are our neighbors, each turning in their sleep as they wake,  
each waking as they turn from their room to the window  
watching the weather above them.

And this is an image of the whole town in shock.  
See how they dread my gray hovering grief, just watch  
as they walk, how they carry on with the endless clouds  
I made weekly, correctly, so very awful and coming  
into their eyes.



**Chicharon**

*By Salud Mora Carriedo*

*Bisaya*

**Chicharon**

(Kilab Nga Sugilanon)

“Chicharon! Chicharon! Tag-baynte ang pak!”

“Tagai ko’g usa, Day,” matud sa babayeng miduol.

“Hutda na lang ni, Nang, para makauli na ko. Tulo singkwenta na lang.”

Gibayran sa babaye ang dalagita. Nagsuot kini’g pug-awg asul nga sayal. Ang iyang puting blaws nagdag na, may nektay nga pareho’g kolor sa sayal ug pug-aw na sab.

“Imo na ‘nang usa, Day! Sakto na ‘ning duha namo!” matud sa ningpalit.

“Salamat, Nang!”

Gisundan sa mga mata sa dalagita ang babaye nga nagpalayo, mitipon sa nagpunsisok nga katawhan sa palengke, hangtud nahanaw siya sa panan-aw.

“Chicharon! Chicharon! Magtiwas! Kinse na lang!”

---

*Filipino*

**Chicharon**

(Dagli)

“Chicharon! Chicharon! Biente isang pak!”

“Bigyan mo ako ng isa, Ne,” sabi ng babaeng lumapit.

“Ubusin nyo na lang po ito, Ate, nang makauwi na po ako. Tatlo singkwenta na lang po.”

Binayaran ng babae ang dalagita. Suot nito’y kupas-asul na palda. Ang kanyang blaws na puti ay nanilaw-nilaw na, may nektay na kasing-kulay ng palda at kupas na rin.

“Sa iyo na yang isa, Ne! Tama na ‘tong dalawa para sa amin!” sabi ng bumili.

“Salamat po, Ate!”

Sinundan ng mga mata ng dalagita ang papalayong ale, nakipagsabayan sa mga taong nagsisiksikan sa palengke, hanggang sa siya’y nawala sa paningin.

“Chicharon! Chicharon! Paubos na po! Kinse na lang!”

---

English

### **Chicharon**

(Flash Fiction)

“*Chicharon! Chicharon!* Twenty [pesos] per pack!”

“Give me one, Girl,” says the woman who comes to her.

“Do buy them all, Ma’am, so that I can go home now. Three packs for just fifty!”

The woman pays the teenage girl. The latter is wearing a faded blue skirt. Her white blouse is yellowish, with necktie that has the same color as the skirt’s and is faded, too.\*

“Take one pack for yourself, Girl! Two is enough for us!” the buyer offers.

“Thank you, Ma’am!”

The teenage girl’s eyes follow the woman as she leaves, dissolves into the market crowd, until she vanishes from sight.

“*Chicharon! Chicharon!* Just one pack remaining! Only fifteen [pesos] now!”

---

*Chicharon* - crackling pork rind

\*Uniform for girls in some public high schools in the Philippines

**This Girl**

*By Melissa Grossman*

She carried a dead coyote to class,  
this girl who kept to herself.  
Roadkill in her car, she drove to school,  
this girl, with thick, unkempt hair.  
When she told the professor  
of her desire to draw the dead animal,  
he polled the other students.  
The drawing class gathered  
in the courtyard, seated  
around the dead coyote,  
sketch pads tilted, raspy sound  
of charcoal on paper.  
This was her moment, this girl  
sitting nearest the corpse, to capture  
the lifeless limbs, the dangling tongue,  
the matted fur, the gray pallor.  
Soon, the stench of decay  
drove all away. She was  
the last to leave, this girl,  
who, this one day,  
came alive.

## Back to Back

By Claire Polders

Two girls, twelve, thirteen perhaps, are sitting back to back on the bedroom floor so as not to look each other in the eye. One has her knees drawn up, whereas the other keeps her legs stretched out in front of her. Their tailbones press hard against the cement underneath the carpet, a discomfort that suits the awkwardness of their exchange.

Between the girls travels a pencil and sheet of paper. They have invented a system to talk about something so shameful it cannot be expressed in speech, yet so urgent it must be shared. It's a complex system they use, because they cannot even write down the word that denotes their subject.

It all began with their shared desire to be the type of friends who keep no secrets from each other. During the first weeks at their new school, they recognized each other's intelligence, shyness, and maturity. Soon they wanted to know something about the other that would protect their friendship and bind them together forever. They agreed to each expose something intimate, not just a memory, but something they did or liked or wished for, and it had to be something they had never told anyone else before. Instead of coming out with it, though, of telling straightaway what was so persistently on their minds, they would play a game of Q and A.

How long have you had this secret?

Does it have to do with school?

Are you always alone when it happens?

Is it something physical?

The questions became so precise and their answers so full of hints, that the girls zeroed in quickly: Their two unnamed secrets were one and the same. That's when speech became unbearable and they reverted to pencil and paper.

See them sitting there, back to back, on the hard floor of the bedroom, the room of the girl whose mother isn't home. Even though the girls aren't speaking and therefore cannot be overheard, the subject they're discussing on paper could not have been discussed in any form had there been a parent present under the same roof.

Now, look at the paper. They are writing in code! Instead of using the word, they have invented a symbol that looks like an asterisk with a circle around it. How accurate. Circumventing their shame in this way, they really open up to each other. They discuss how often and where and when for the first time—all without a giggle; their habit is a serious matter. Afterward, they tear up the paper and split the slivers between them to be burned in two different fireplaces that very night.

Years later, they hear from their brothers and lovers that boys masturbate in front of one another to see who can shoot the farthest. They are embarrassed when they hear this—wild with envy.

*Originally published in Word Riot*

**Sister's Night Walk**

*By Abbey Chew*

Her nightgown, white and long, breaks the  
dark like a ship's prow,  
then lets the night come together again around  
the flitting hem.

Her breath shags out — just as white, just as white as the  
cotton — from her mouth only to drift back, curl over her  
ears, and away.

As she moves, her body lights up  
the night for brief moments that seem like praise, the air  
around her skin flaring up — auroras drawing movement  
from her blood, taking something for their own. And the  
night wonders just as much: Where does she go?  
What calls to draw her warm, curled body  
out of bed, into the night? Sister keeps her secrets. If the night  
knows, if it holds the secret —  
what waits outside the house, porch, gravel lane —  
If the night knows, it isn't telling either.

## Nice Girl

By Cindy Lynn Brown

Nice Girl has greasy fingers and trouble breathing. She digs a basement underneath the house. She will use it as rehearsal space. Nice Girl always rehearses before speaking, before brushing herself free from dandruff and before mixing the ingredients. Nice Girl keeps many tiny things in boxes and drawers: shiny stones, creased playing cards and salient disappointments. Her most visible treasure is the sign saying *Guys' n' Dolls* in retro font.

Nice Girl looks at her brother behind the counter. With the red tie. It can be difficult to get in contact with him. It suffices to look at him carefully and pervasively. He has lost his ring, white gold, glossy and warm from skin, it's gone and the pale stripe on the finger it left won't last long in August. Nice girl is chosen and so is her little brother. Chosen to heal the sick and the poor. Take their money and make them healthy and agile.

Nice Girl has a steamroller with grooves and soil and rubber. It pelts and crackles all her thoughts. Nice Girl has often been arrested for strolling on the freeway, for using the splinters from her ancient glass ceiling as a weapon or for eating too much chocolate at night. Dark dark chocolate.

Nice Girl works in an office. She edits and proofreads and hones until Nice Girl cannot contain any more corrections. She saves all of the handwritten letters in a dainty red suitcase, before she lights the fire. The rest is already saved in the Cloud.

Nice Girl doesn't feel like walking away. It's hard to leave little brother behind the counter. Despite the red tie it is hard to disappear from each other's lives. Nice Girl feels nauseous. There is a sweet, oily scent at the counter and little brother avoids eye contact. She knows he is not coming along with her. Little brother serves a single cherry latte. She'll have to drink it. Before taking off.

**Entwined Moon**

*By Lauren Triola*

I wanted to catch the moon. Wrap it in a string, wear it around my neck. I could drag the tides as I walked, guide my way with milky white, keep it on my desk at night and watch it wax and wane all for me. But then they told me no, I couldn't catch the moon. Impossible, they said. Ridiculous. It's not just a light in the sky, it's a massive body of stone. It would crush me, the world, and my desk. So I stopped trying. I let it stay in the sky. But I kept the string.



**This Girl**

*By Ellie O'Leary*

Everybody in Somerville is either  
Irish or Italian  
and we're Irish.

Everybody is Catholic except a few  
are Protestant  
and we are High Episcopal.

Everybody knows we are supposed to be Catholic but  
I know my mother  
said we aren't.

Everybody tells me my family will be happier  
when we move to the country  
where things will go more smoothly.

Everybody has a mother and a father unless  
your mother dies  
like mine did.

Everybody knows being poor means nothing  
in a place where  
everybody is poor.

The most important thing is having  
a boy who likes you but  
boys don't like smart girls.

Being one is no help at all if you  
are lonely or sick  
of raising your hand.

Someday my prince won't come and  
I'll go off on my own  
to see what I find.

Everybody knows smart girls go to college and  
this one is going  
to one called Bates.

Everybody has a mother and a father or  
a mother or a father  
unless your father dies, too.

Everybody knows 18 is old enough to be  
independent and  
this girl is ready.

## Regina

By Valerie Speedwell

Regina is a blend of poetry and jazz, performance and lyrics, offensive, full of swagger, she found the world on fire and threw more flame on it, thick girl, addicted to jelly rolls and pies, the expanse of her spilling over chairs and benches and edges of things, fat but hungry for more because what they feeding her not filling her, dark-eyed girl, color of pitch, one tooth missing, her badge for living in a city made from a blueprint of ditches, hacked-off steel bars and water pipes, her kinky hair separated in two big twists, it's too nappy to flatten and smooth with the sizzle of an iron like the pretty girls, the girls with good hair, gold hoop earrings big as hub caps in her ears, the girth of her squeezed into clothes too small because no one around to buy her new ones, preteen, pre-diva, pre-ghetto queen, unafraid to speak her mind, speak her heart, speak, sing, shout to anyone and everyone who can hear, to stamp her feet, wave her hands, snap her fingers, shoulders going, part prophet, part entertainer, ever combative, her mouth a machine gun shooting words to take out the crowd, to slay them into silence and admiration with her rhyme and her song, the rhyme of the streets in her voice, the rise of church rafters in her voice, the rhythm of beat boxes in her voice, you hear them going strong as she jumps from vowel to vowel, sing song in iambic pentameter, the special meter of the inner city child, flowing about New York, about Central Harlem, about daddy in penitentiary, momma gone in the needle, being motherless and fatherless, a long way from home, about being, having been, what she might be some day, money, money, always hustling for money these days, even as she's saying this, sharing with you her heart, pulling you in, she's a breath away from sticking her finger in your face, one hand on her hip, a Nubian jewel with a bite, fearless in the face of danger, things that'd terrify a grown man, send him running, armed only with words, words, blasted on the schoolyard, sidewalk, any piece of asphalt, she's looking for an audience, looking for a crowd, for their approval and applause, and despite she's fat, despite she's ugly, despite the world expects her to fail, the crowd calls out *go Regina, go Regina*, because she is revolutionary and shocking, two snaps and a circle, what she has to say inappropriate, uncooperative, emotional and tough, but her delivery, half-spoken/half-sung, full of rolling music and finger snaps, is smoooooooooooooth, so smooth, smooth, smooth, when you hear her, Regina gives you goose bumps.