**Acceso (acceso.ku.edu)**

Unidad 1, Un paso más

El poder de la poesía de Denice Frohman

Denice Frohman - "Borders"

(Poem read with a radical-aggressive enthusiasm to reflect poem’s thematic line)

It starts before she gets here

before the stairs tell her she’s alien to a country

that knows her great-grandfather’s Mexican hands all too well.

His fingerprints still echo underneath railroad tracks

and cotton fields from Texas to California where

bent knees and bent hands once picked, plucked, pushed,

worked for more money than he was used to.

But less than he deserved.

For Ana Maria, it begins before the border.

She walks with her two uncles to the desert for one week,

with nothing more than a few gallons of water and

a prayer tucked into their pockets hoping both will last them long enough.

The Sun is an unforgiving god.

But any god is worth having right now.

The wind pushing at their backs, the grunt of gunshots from drug cartels

and the desperation of a job to employ their stomachs.

Both have been uninvited guests at their doorstep.

So they step, step.

Ana Maria’s small hand clutches the bottom of her abuela’s dress.

Her mother waits for her on the other side,

hoping that her face still sings of home like it used to.

Another step, she is too young to know what border means.

She thinks that people, just family

members who haven’t met yet.

After her family arrives, she will learn

there are some borders you can’t cross by foot.

Ana Maria is now ten years old, she’s learned enough

English to translate for her parents but says that her thick

accent is still a problem she tries to fix by leaving in her locker.

When the teacher calls on her to read,

she tries to speak “proper” like “proper” has a sound.

She pushes her tongue down so she doesn’t roll her R’s

but she trips on the flatness of the syllables that bounce with too much salsa.

She tries to rattle out the kinks in her speech

but her tongue is a stubborn dancer.

The two boys behind her don’t know how to do long division,

but they know what a wetback is.

And that Ana Maria has braids,

and that Ana Maria’s hair is thicker than their sisters.

And they don’t know how they know,

but they know how to treat difference when they smell it,

so they say things like, “YO! Go back to your country.”

As if their Irish ancestors never walked through Ellis Island.

Ana Maria is now 16.

Her father works 18-hour days as a dishwasher.

Her mother cleans houses she’ll never get to live in

so that Ana Maria can sit in a college classroom and say, “I am here.”

But her guidance counselor says she can’t get financial aid

or the instate tuition rate because of her status.

She says it like an apology.

Ana wonders if her family ever crossed the border,

or if they are just stuck inside another one, aggravating it like a soul.

Her guidance counselor stands in front of her, with a mouth full of fences.

There are some borders you can’t cross by foot,

but borders I tell her, that can only be crossed by stubborn backbones.

(increasingly raising her voice)

So, when they ask you for your papers, Ana, show them your skin,

wear your tongue like a cape,

throw up your fist like a secret you can’t keep any longer,

they can’t keep you any longer.

Afraid, you can’t ever afford to drop a dream,

so, when they come for you, tell them, in the language that you know best,

that you are not scared anymore!

(Applause, cheering)

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