

Shoelaces  
Second Place Poetry 2005

The act of lacing up a new pair of sneakers always excited me.  
Evening out both ends, untwisting the crisscrosses,  
then, sometimes changing the standard laces to ones with designs:  
Cookie Monster or Barbie or Smurfs.  
One pair I proudly wore in Kindergarten had emblazoned in red letters:  
“I HATE SCHOOL”  
before I knew of tests and homework in my lovely suburban elementary school,  
with comfy naptime mats and colorful bulletin boards.

Yes, kids make statements with their shoelaces,  
so I found it strange that the chico walked into the clinic  
with laceless, tattered shoes.  
Something made me focus on his feet.  
Was it because he stared at me with intense hazel eyes,  
more marked against his tico tanned complexion?  
Or maybe because I didn't want to stare at his hands,  
nervously clenched and then fidgeting, with dirt long embedded under the nails.  
I thought it was because I smelled a foul odor,  
the odor of bare feet in dirty shoes.

How could I know that this fifteen year old  
tied together the frayed ends of his shoelaces  
into a makeshift noose  
and stepped off his desk, hanging  
suspended in air  
hoping to fly  
peacefully out of this dilapidated place,  
this makeshift town of tin roofs,  
this school of broken glass,  
this supposed Costa Rica?

But the laces snapped,  
and now he sits  
hunched over  
before me,  
laceless and lost.

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