

## WOUNDS

Carmen Tafolla

I.

Watched the words on the office memo circulate  
Insinuating Discriminating Disempowering  
Heard the laughter of the guys, the privileged club  
who had their beers together after work  
to her exclusion

Her stomach, a vacuum, a burning hole in tripas corazón.  
Then I—accidentally—  
Cut myself with paper

Saw the ambulance wail white, scream red, like La Llorona,  
mourn the body of the woman who had desperately called police  
six times, each time met with reasons why she didn't qualify  
for a restraining order, since she'd never married or lived with  
the man no one explaining what *could* be done, only  
reassurances that most ex-boyfriends' threats aren't  
followed through. The stretcher's weight too honest for the empty  
curtains she had watched through, waiting.

Then I—accidentally—  
Poked my eye, a screaming red

Read the college senior's essay on the wrongs of deportation  
Confession Denouncement Memoir Plea  
writing even though she *knew* that this could not be shared

for fear of her own  
 Deportation Separation Severance  
 Then I—accidentally—  
 Stabbed my hand with a fine-point pen

Attended Neighborhood Association railroading  
 the block of quiet Spanish-speakers with Development Requests  
 to bring in complexes for business sorts, a better clientele, higher rents, professionals,  
 ignoring zoning restrictions that protect every *other* block with single family laws  
 ignoring pleas from mothers, pointing out that drug abusers and  
 child molesters come from all income levels, pleas asking why *their* block  
 must change its character and permanence? *“How can we take  
 them seriously when they don’t even register complaints in English?”*  
 Association Minutes state their full support of development  
 on that block. Somehow the blow on table’s edge  
 accidentally  
 injured my ear with sharp things it was forced to hear.

Felt in my chest the fear and shrunken spirits as the children marched  
 like little prisoners of war to state-mandated high-stakes tests  
 of self-worth and of school-survival. This school laid so low beneath  
 the advertised “preferred” schools, on whom the very tests are normed,  
 a built-in lie from profit-making foxes guarding test validity hen houses  
 as they sell “truths” by which these students never  
 stand a chance to be preferred. Or even equal  
 Accidentally tripped and broke  
 my confidence, belief in systems,  
 spirit bleeding from too many  
 wounds

II.

The women in my family always said that  
wounds were best healed by fresh ocean water  
ocean waves who with their lapping brine heal horrifying  
redness and the purpleness of pus and pain and poison  
Then not by accident do I invoke the oceans  
Roaring waves of words  
tides rolling in and slipping out  
leaving driftwords on the sand  
roaring in with *LA VERDAD*  
whispering *la verdad*  
roaring *SOMOS*  
whispering *somos*  
roaring *FUERZA DE*  
*VIDA*

—Is this why violence is turned to us,  
who by our nature create life  
breathe cycles, birth, and nurse  
all that grows and feeds and builds  
and does not destroy?—

The pregnant ocean's waves of words whisper,  
whisper  
highest healing power  
*tú*