

Oración a la Virgen Norteña

by Elvia R. Arriola

Walking through the small Illinois
town of DeKalb one day
Peering through an antique
shop window
I saw your image

an exact replica of
La Virgen that I'd
grown up with at home in California
And I remembered
darkened hallways
maybe a votive candle nearby
the aroma of Mexican rice or
fideo cooking
The sound of Abuelita's feet
shuffling in her chancas back and
forth across
the kitchen floor
and the faint distant noise of a
TV in the background of my mind

La Virgen del Perpetuo Socorro
I said out loud
No one to hear this but myself
Our Lady of Perpetual Help
And I sighed

I stood for a while
With my nose pressed against
The window
And caught sight of the golden rays
Painted in your frame
And remembered how much
Mama Lucy liked to paint
Favorite objects with
The color of gold from a 99¢ spray can
A mist of imaginary halos
Around a beloved Saint Anthony
Or the paper maiché starry night
For a Christmas Baby Jesus
Or just a spray of sprinkled love
And light that could brighten
A retired woman's lonely nights

Soon my nose against that window
Was accompanied by a momentary



Grasping of both hands against the glass
Of the closed shop
A longing for a feeling
A memory of lost mothers and abuelitas
To wrap me in their rebozos of
Love and caress
To bring back that warmth and safety
In the shadow of La Virgen
del Perpetuo Socorro
To whom I write now these words
Help me dear Lady
To recall a sense of faith
Help me remember the treasures of my youth
The values I once held dear that
Got me through lonely lights
Won't you please hear me
And help?

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