

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