Stone Tongue

By Florinda Flores

The doctor observes.
My son's green-marbled eyes peer
up at her. His kitten lips squirm,
open, and leaden consonants
stripped of vowels fall out,
more stone than speech.

I read aloud to him:
"What does the cow
say to her baby?"

The doctor explains,
"Sound begets speech."
My son with the stone
tongue sits at the bottom
of a placid pool where
sound travels as a ripple
on the glassy surface.

I ask,
"What does the cow
say to her baby?"

The doctor says my words
are drops
in
the
water—

tiny, expanding rings,
vibrating mandalas
that disintegrate,
disappear without
breaching the surface.

I press:
"What does the cow
say to her baby?"

After the doctor signs referrals,
I take my son with the dull ears
Home, cradle him in the crook
of my arm, open his favorite
baby animals book. My lips hover
by his downy ear. I read
about cow and calf
again and again
probing for an answer—
a chink in the stone,
a wave in the water.

I implore:
"What does the cow
say to her baby?"
My son's marbled eyes fix
on my moving lips.
His brow crinkles.

Tears blur my vision as though
I've breached water. His tiny, pink
fingertip touches the drop
on my cheek. His lips
stretch into a smile full of teeth
and tongue. He doesn't speak,
but I know what he says.

Forehead
to forehead I whisper,
"The cow says moo."

About the Author

Florinda Flores is a writer and educator from Laredo, Texas, now living in San Antonio. She has a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre and Dance from the University of Texas at Austin and a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from Goddard College. After teaching for eight years as both a bilingual elementary school teacher and a college English instructor, she serves as Gemini Ink's Writers in Communities program director. Florinda writes plays and fiction while occasionally dabbling in poetry. Her favorite pastimes include running, reading, and hanging out with her husband, two boys, and three dogs.