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.