

For Vera

We begin again, intracultural.
Rephrase each second question,
make little corrections,
go on.

A kind of white magic, the quiet
cropping up here. We can mail it
via USPS. I turn midnight circles in a Honda
around the 125 stores of Las Americas,
bring flowers when I pick up migrants
who know only my name. Our custom.
I cover fresh bread – immutable,
folded – with cloth.

Your long hair, little sister.
For roughly half an hour,
I have a brother. Then he's gone
for Chicago. I let them all be
my symbols for speech and for faith in rehearsal.
Their earth is split open and they hardly sleep.

They used to walk miles through a flurry of white
and dark brown in the chestnuts – rows of them
saved by arborists before the war. Now, there
is more than could ever be checked
for signs of survival.

I take them to dinner by the sea.
I make space in the house.
When I say *windbreaker*, they picture
a sword. If *southwest*, then
they think of Odessa. I leave Texas
out of it – would rather not break
these literal spells, not like

arranging photographs of equivalent
edges. Dark sleeves.
Windows in concrete,

grey on grey with no first or last floor.
A smudged crystal whiskey glass.
Curled-up cat. Close sky
of immeasurable mist.

Another disposable day.
When we slow to a roar
along the American River,
we imagine the water as neither
pure nor polluted. Its deep green
is not thorn-heavy nor sweet.
They no longer need that escapeway.