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## Select Poems

Noelia Young

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**Noelia Young** is a spoken word poet based in Fayetteville, Arizona and received her Bachelor's in English from Westminster College in Missouri. She is currently working on a book of poems discussing her experiences as a first-generation immigrant and a book of essays about the Arkansas prison system. She is a reader for Tinderbox Poetry Journal and a poetry mentor for Pen America's Prison Writing Mentorship program. Her poems have appeared in audio form in Terse. She was most recently the featured poet for Hot Spring's Wednesday Night Poetry event and the Northwest Arkansas Community College's Spring Arts & Culture Festival.

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## Brown

The brown, corporate girl enters the van. Typical, soccer mom van. Suburban staple. Her white boss is driving, while she and three white coworkers discuss the day.

As the conversation fills the air she sits, looking out the window, watching the city roll by aware that she is the only brown girl in this space.

It is not a feeling of fear that fills her chest but one of sadness.

Suddenly longing to look back and catch a flash of brown

or black skin amongst the sea of white. She walks past the storefronts trailing her party, an island locked in the Central US.

The door to the restaurant opens and the beat of the *latino* music wafts out with the smells of seasoned *carne* and cooking onions, Spanish words surround her and she steps into this home.

The cooks are all brown. They turn the *carne* on the fire as they dance to the music and laugh.

It is loud and warm and smells like a *fritanga*.

Brightly colored banners hang in rows spreading across the ceiling the colors warm and inviting. They remind her of the open air markets

where the brightly colored shirts hang throughout tents

and the smell of cooking meat wafts between the aisles

as the street vendors call out to the passersby to enter their stores calling them

queens,

sweethearts, loves,

princesses,

*corazon*

Wicker lanterns are spaced across the ceiling mingling with the colored banners they sway with the breeze casting shadows below

twinkling in the dark room like mother's prayers in the night  
as two parents prepare themselves to bring two little girls to the promised land  
hoping they would not forget the histories in their skin.  
Laughing with her white coworkers the brown girl bites into her carne *asada* street tacos letting the  
flavor fill her mouth and Narcisco Yepes playing Romance wafts through her mind reminding her of  
a time she was a little girl and her father  
would serenade her with his Spanish guitar  
and her curly hair was beautiful, and her brown skin was enough  
and she remembers what it feels like to be proud of who she is  
so she rides back to the office looking out the window, smiling now  
and when she reaches her desk pulls the scrunchy out of her hair fluffs it  
into a frizzy mass of curls lets it hang loose around her shoulders  
puts her headphones in and ends the day with Narcisco  
with wild hair, brilliant smile, looking like the little girl her parents raised.

# Rust

This is how it begins—a slow decay, rust—  
traditions dusty and unused, a film of cultural rust.

I break my spine to display humility as woman  
should. He says “duty.” I see rust.  
To cover and conceal. To cause damage. To break.  
My pride almost abandoned and grown over with rust.  
He said beauty is in the ability to bow your head.  
My mother learned to make herself small, dress in rust.  
My back is iron rod. I cannot bend.  
It will not fold into this mold, won’t yield to rust  
and I am too loud, too quick to raise my voice,  
my questions grenades blowing apart his expectations, rust  
Bowed heads mean surrender and I do not make habits  
of gifting him wars, abandoning my pride to rust.  
My stubbornness will be my end but I dig in  
my heels anyways; his anger will fade. Rust.  
His disappointment will ebb like ocean waves.  
I am battleship. I will break before I rust.  
As water always meets the shore, salt to sand  
I, Noelia, will find my path. I will not yield or rust.

# Tourism and Soda

The tourists  
could never figure it out  
“la bolsita se corta asi”  
my father would explain to them  
“cut the corner of the bag, here.”  
They would tilt the bag awkwardly  
and hold it close to their bodies  
spilling the liquid down their expensive clothing.  
The vendors on the sidewalks lined with palm trees  
would sell soda in bags  
from their brightly painted carts to the passersby  
And yet, they could never understand how to drink it  
“Van a botar la soda!”  
one vendor would say  
scratching his head  
in amazement and amusement  
My father shows the tourists  
how to tip the soda  
to the back of the bag  
so that they could cut the corners  
and drink the cold, sticky sweetness from them  
“Why can’t you people just sell them in cups?  
Like normal folks?”  
one woman asked  
We would simply laugh and respond  
“Pura Vida”  
as we watched the soda dribble down their shirts  
and mingle with the dirt beneath their feet  
Dirt that was not good enough  
to soil their Nikes