Dorita sits at her dek, a bundle of nerves and impatient feet. The heels of her shoes squeak on the linolum tiles as she taps her toes to the rhyhm of the clock’s ticking. Seat drips down her back. She imagines an entre colony of ants crwling beneath the fabric of her bluse. They collect on the elastic waistand of her skirt and soak through, making her twich in her seat too.

1

Around her, sevral others betray their neres too. Fingrs pull at hair, pencils tap furiusly against desks. Mr. McDonald stands at the front of the classoom, chalk squaking on the blackbard. He blabbers on abot the Civil War.

2

3

Dorita closs her eyes and brathes. She starts to woder if maybe she should just reain in class after all, and be a good sdent. Sit hee and make her parets proud.

Or she cold walk out.

4

The wods reverbrate within her head, sylables splitting and reproducing like cells--infinite. Her boyfriend Emmnuel had dropped out of scool last fall. The palms of his hands had still been brght red from where his teacher had brought own the ruler with a vengeance. He had forgotten the word ‘escalate.’ is teaher had asked, with an ipatient urgncy, “Come on, Emmanuel. Wht are you trying to say?”  “It had grown! Ugh.” He had pulled at his hair, trying to yank out that drn word that just wan’t there. “How do you say it?.”

5

The Spaish escaped him, an honst mistake. It was what one did when trying to remember a word. One simply spoke it in another language, hopig the brin could transate. But a bit of Spansh meant punishent and the ruler was promptly pulled out from a drawer in the teacher’s desk.

He was paiting a mural now, up Eagle street. One of many, he said. His biggest dream was to becme an artist and ake East L.A. feel like home. Home, sweet home.

6

“You knw, this place is .“ He’d tell her. “I just wat to make it look like it.”

Dorita kne what he meant. If Los Angeles were alive, its heart would be here in the East side. This is where the streets call out to her in English and Espańol. Where the wide sun-baked roads are full of the symhonic sounds of rubling cars and voices shouting out in accents, their English still thick with their native tongue. The Santa Ana wids in this part of the city carry with them the smells of sizzling meat from the taco stand in the corner, of fabrc softener from the laundomat, of the thick scnt of oil from the auto shops. Palm trees stand at the edges of the sidewalks, their gren leaves exploding out like firewrks against the sky. This was a heart that beat with the rhthm of a thousand tambores and it pumped pure Chicano blood.

7