**De Todo Corazón**

Evangeline Sanders

I.

A pianist plucks a sheet

from her binder, props it

on the music shelf, straightens

out her skirt as she clears her throat,

tucks hair behind her ear.

We stretch our necks, standing

on tiptoes to glimpse our parents

perched on fold-up chairs

in the audience, cameras raised.

Twenty-four pairs of shoes

stomp on carpeted risers, spin

around and clap, snap and clap

and spin around, paper chain necklaces

rustling with red, green,

white, strings of yarn and glitter,

hands thrown to the ceiling

on the opening chord of the

chorus. *Fel**íz Navidad*.

II.

In those days, by the broom closet

in the back left corner

of the classroom, Spanish

is thumb-tacked posters with bubble

letters, clip art sombreros, maracas,

Mexican roses, cutout quetzals:

l*os colores, los días, los meses,*

*el* *alfabeto*. Purple *martes*, bright

yellow s*ábado*, fat and sleek,

straight edged, printed beside

a sketch of a sun with shades

and a tennis visor. A handful

of Smarties and Silly Bandz

for anyone who could stand and

recite the alphabet all the way

through, rolling their *R*’s

with a wet flick of the tongue.

III.

Spanish ripens like a papaya

in the seat by the fourth floor

window. Fill-in-the-blank

worksheets, dog-eared textbooks

(gently used), vocabulary face-offs

in front of the class. A teacher

with bright pink underpants,

a paper rose in his shirt

pocket, a hand on the

shoulder of a girl with braces

and a purple backpack.

And then, years later,

Cervantes, Allende, Marquéz,

*One Hundred Years of Solitude*,

*Jungle Tales*. Banana plantations,

imperial capitalism, analyses of

space and mood. A gray Picasso

painting with a Fascist bull

and wild-eyed horse, mouth

flung to the sky, screaming.

IV.

My friend asks me the question

at a Mexican restaurant.

*You´re afraid to speak to people*

*in Spanish.* *Why?*

I picture my coworkers

from South America

who laugh, smile, slab tuna salad on

toasted bread, press their bodies

together on the picnic table

because they can smell home

on each other’s skin.

The two-stanza, eight-line poem

I spent four hours writing

for my Hispanic Literature class

because I didn’t know how

to forge something beautiful

out of a language that wasn’t my own.

*I don´t know,* I respond.

She shrugs, reaching for a chip.

*Me neither.*

V.

*Felíz Navidad,* I tell the

hostess on our way out the door.

She smiles, waves. *Felíz Navidad.*

Our eyes meet, and my mouth

falls open to finish

the blessing, but she is already gone,

guiding another family

to their table.

I whisper it to myself as I step

into the parking lot.

*De todo corazón*.