**As We Walk to Meet My Mexican-American Father**

Lenna Mendoza

we pass a group of Latino boys with blazing

grins, their laughter bounding toward new jokes.

Their joy lifts them up above the Dallas skyline.

But, somehow, or maybe for this exact reason,

they scare my white mother across the street.

I do remind her that she’s taken us farther

from our destination, but I don’t know if I remind her

of the boys. With each repetition of *Why’d you cross?*

I age backwards until I am three, clinging to a sleeve.

My interrogation is met with scoffing and quickened feet.

Later, in the mirror, I will ache to find my real face—

tracing the outline of the lip, eyebrow, cheekbone.

It’s a common practice in longer evenings, this excavation

of my fake race, nowhere residing, but everywhere:

my *rr*’s (improved with practice), my taste in music, in food,

teaching Dad the word *cicada* but loving better *chicharra*,

the still-boxed rosaries in my closet, my dancing locus,

my skin (tanned or burned), these names: first through last,

the years of intermittent Sign of Peace kisses emblazoned

on my cheeks, my fear, my fear. Each fucked spell of fear.

I don’t wanna be the white lady who’s scared of smiling boys.

I have felt her scouring me, eager to be blanker, more devoid,

so she can clutter this body with severed bootstraps and weapons

made of words she does not own, rye whiskey, and sweet complicity.

I don’t wanna be the white lady who’s scared of smiling boys.