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## To My English Student

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# To My English Student

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LINDA CHOWN

Mary Carmen? am I that strange  
when I suggest balancing Samuel Beckett  
on your head or when I ask you dead  
serious what color the sky is?  
or to count the teeth in your head.  
Sometimes your bright girl eyes  
fade and flicker, saying more to me  
than your wart-scarred hands twisting  
the folds of your red plaid skirt.  
Sometimes when I make you close  
those eyes to hear the sounds come pure,  
I think you think I'm crazy—  
after all, after our first class  
you told your mother my Spanish  
wasn't like anything you'd ever heard.

But you go on anyhow and count and conjugate  
and name all the colors in the room.  
I ask you how old is your brother  
and do you like wine or fish or beer.  
And you being 8 years old and free of boys,  
yourself from your ponytail to your brown  
worn boots, almost immaculate in your youth,  
come, I think, to watch that funny foreigner  
perform and clown, to see if you can match  
the strangeness of my English sound  
and you know for an hour or two each week  
I become the little girl and you, grownup,  
poised all proper and slightly sceptical  
on the edge of your seat.