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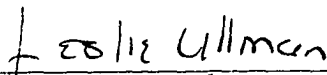
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ALL THAT I REMEMBER

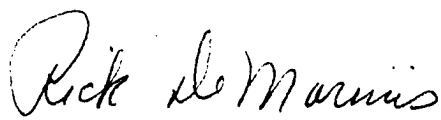
JOSE ADAN GARCIA

English Department

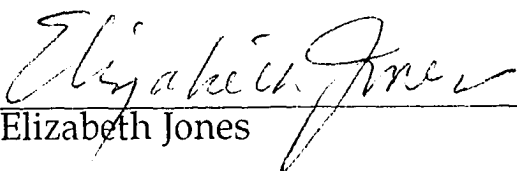
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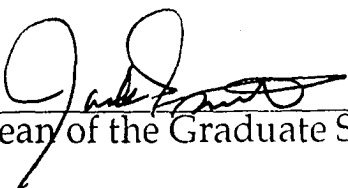
Leslie Ullman, Chair



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Dean of the Graduate School

ALL THAT I REMEMBER

by

JOSE ADAN GARCIA, B.A.

THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at El Paso

in partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

English Department

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

May 1991

Writing

Miss Harper was a spinster and so was her sister, the other Miss Harper. Miss Mary was a teller at the City Bank, and had been for as long as anyone remembered. When I went there with my mother, I'd see her looking out from behind the brass bars of her window. She had snow-white hair that was set in tight, stiff curls and wore her gold-framed spectacles right on the bridge of her nose. She'd look straight into my eyes as she counted out small bills onto Mother's palm. I'd hide behind Mother's skirt and peek out to see if she'd gone back to her business. She would always say, "Goodbye shy boy," and wave at me just when we got to the door. I'd see her after school waiting for Miss Willie in their black DeSoto in the teachers' parking lot. I'd walk past her as fast as I could, pretending to look at my shadow on the sidewalk.

Miss Willie was my first grade teacher and had been my father's first grade teacher forty-five years before. In my mind, she seemed younger than Miss Mary. She had white hair too, but it was longer and she'd braid it in different ways all the time. She'd greet each one of us at the door in the morning and take our coats and hang them in the closet at the back of the classroom when the tardy bell rang. Often, we'd sit in a circle and she'd read to us, telling us to imagine this or that, or we'd work with numbers at the chalkboard.

She'd walk around the room in slow patient steps with all the answers. At the end of the day, Miss Willie would make sure that our laces were tied and that we had something to read in our satchels. Miss Willie taught me to write.

She taught eleven other six-year-olds that year. A pencil meant as much to me then as the crayons with which I smeared dog or horse figures on my bedroom wall. Maybe a little less. Pencils don't have the fine virtue of blending in with pastel wallpaper. The Pedigree Huskies Miss Willie required that her students write with were as thick as a grown man's middle finger. With mine, I made figures in my Big Chief tablet that were just as subtle.

"Posture is the most important aspect of writing," Miss Willie would say as she went around the room straightening slumped backs and planting our feet firmly on the floor. "You must never, ever lay your head down on the paper. You might fall asleep and drool, and then what will you do?"

My problem was that I wanted to skip right over manuscript writing and get into cursive. I wanted to write my name in fine Spencerian characters like Miss Willie did in the letters she sent home to my mother. "The word *cursive* means *running*," she would tell me, "and you're not ready to run yet."

Our models were sensible Roman letters stencilled onto the front of little boxes that looked like Chinese takeout containers: *sans* the wire handles. The boxes were filled with items whose names started

with the corresponding letters.

Miss Willie kept a pair of mittens and a few stray marbles inside the one with Mm and a picture of two longtailed mice on the front. My favorite was the Yy box with a woolly Yak and calf on the front. Inside it was a yoyo and a ball of yellow yarn. It took three strokes of my Husky to make a capital Y, and two for the small one, because of the angle of the downstroke. The most complicated was a three-stroke small m. I had a tendency to give it a third hump.

With time, I worked my way through all fifty-two, making each letter with exactly the same strokes, in the same order, every time I wrote them. I began to write whole words and complete sentences. The very first sentence I wrote went like this: "My name is Joe Garcia." The first non-mimetic one was, "I like to run." Miss Willie congratulated me by saying, "Very good, Joe. Now that you have the tools, you can tell me what is rattling around in that head of yours. People forget, you know. Writing helps them remember."

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Walking on Water

My friends and I walked on water until we were twelve.
We skipped fast across lily pads at the pond: naked
little male Venusians hopping
across green shells, stepping on the pearls. We were defying
gravity—the way the world keeps her own.
Botticelli would have thought so.

Sinking didn't enter our minds for a decade
or so of our lives, and then it crept in
like water in the ear for swimmers or seepage in the basement
after four days of rain. You just knew it was there.

One by one we plunged on the first step,
our weight on our bones,
down to bottom, knee deep in muck.

In deep water there are no shadows
and the closest thing to light is your hand.
We had to learn that water lifts us
as long as we hold our breath.

Hands

Skimming a stone across a pond
where tailings from a gold mine end up, my hands
remember raising a fist, choking the throat
of no one in particular. The simple hurling
motion of my arm sends me
back to this more primitive state. I remember
that hands are for holding
other hands, rubbing
together, touching the world
in its secret places.

My hands touch my face
the most and remember it least. My face is
also part of the world.
And if my arms were longer
I might scoop valuable
ore out from this mire at the edge
of the mine where I am.

When I put my hands behind my back
I don't remember them at all.
I close my eyes and deposit my secret in that shadow:
a hand is four fingers, a thumb, and a palm.

An Alcoholic's Confession

I'm trying to stare straight into the space directly
in front of my eyes for as long as I can.
I might go crosseyed if I keep it up.
I hate to look at people unless they wander
in front of my line of vision
like boxcars on a rail. Only looking straight ahead
takes something away from them, too; maybe everything.
It is a way of hiding in broad daylight. I think
it might be an illness like the one in which your tonsils
get as big as ping pong balls or chicken gizzards.
Only liquid gets through.

Ignoring everyone around has taught me
that I can always see my nose. I just forget.
In cold weather I can also see my breath
tumble out of my mouth letting the whole world
know about the alliance between liquid and air.

Traveling at Dawn

This morning the sun
seemed closer than usual rotating
like a giant flaming top at the edge
of the world. I wanted to take it in my palm
and see whether it really pulls oceans up
a little in bulges of water we call tides
or if in its absence, earth might stop circling and spin
off into space leaving the sky black: day and night.
Because the sun was the length of a man's forearm
from me, I forgot I was traveling
in a sheet-metal womb along the planet's curve
and not a pharaoh dead in a tomb.

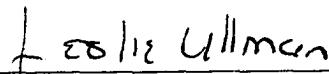
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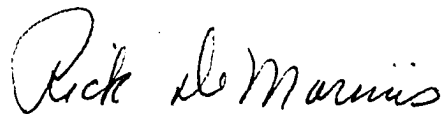
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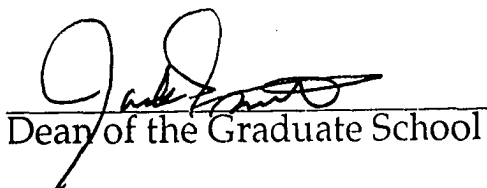
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