



CHILDHOOD READING

Delicatessen. Billow. Lineage. These words roll on my tongue like a wedge of ice; slick, opaque, and unwieldy. I swallow them, feeling the lilt of every sound, each page a bright, empty balloon. They carry me, lift me from the cracked tiled floor of my mother's pacing, a handful of unopened envelopes in her hand, eyes wild as they scan the label.

Vineyard. Bestowed. Satin. I try to keep them in my head, floating behind my eyes, as I translate another letter that my mother won't explain. I scan the pages for phrases: no change, appointment, reduction, increase, pass, denied. The more words, the more my mother panics, urging me, "*¿Que dice ahí?*" She carries her fear like a black umbrella, pulling me into her shadow.

Duvet. Éclair. San Francisco. I hear them slip past another person's lips, thick earth, damp after rain, stuffed with seeds, worms, roots, the innocuous sound of a word and a place and a thing I had read but knew nothing about. And what can I say back? The only words I've lived: HUD, PHA, SSI, SNAP. Or the strangled voice of my mother as she tears open another letter from la agencia, her hands restless. This one she doesn't need my help with. "*Viene el inspector.*"