I Was a Skinny Tomboy Kid
By Alma Luz Villanueva

I was a skinny tomboy kid
who walked down the streets
with my fists clenched into
tight balls.
I knew all the roofs
And back yard fences,
    I liked traveling that way
    sometimes
    not touching
    the sidewalks
    for blocks and blocks
    it made
    me feel
    victorious
    somehow
over the streets.
I liked to fly
    from roof
    to roof
    the gravel
    falling
    away
beneath my feet,
    I liked
    the edge
of almost
not making it.

    And the freedom
    of riding
    my bike
    to the ocean
and smelling it
    long before
I could see it,
    and I traveled disguised
    as a boy
(I thought)
    in an old army jacket
    carrying my
    fishing tackle
    to the piers, and
    bumming bait
and a couple of cokes

Annotations to Make:
- Evidence of figurative language used
- Evidence of sound devices used
- Margin notes containing both questions that you have about the text as well as clarifying your understanding by summarizing or inferring what various portions of the text mean (i.e., think about the text on a deeper level)
and catching crabs
sometimes and
selling them
to some Chinese guys
and I’d give
the fish away,
I didn’t like fish
I just liked to fish—
and I vowed
to never
grow up
to be a woman
and be helpless
like my mother,
but then I didn’t realize
the kind of guts
it often took
for her to just keep
standing
where she was.

I grew like a thin, stubborn weed
watering myself whatever way I could
believing in my own myth
transforming my reality
and creating a
legendary/self
every once in a while
late at night
in the deep
darkness of my sleep
I wake
with a tenseness
in my arms
and I follow
it from my elbow to
my wrist
and realize
my fists are tightly clenched
and the streets come grinning
and I forget who I’m protecting
and I coil up
in a self-mothering fashion
and tell myself
it’s o.k.
In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters. It means sadness, it means waiting. It is like the number nine. A muddy color. It is the Mexican records my father plays on Sunday mornings when he is shaving, songs like sobbing.

It was my great-grandmother's name and now it is mine. She was a horse woman too, born like me in the Chinese year of the horse--which is supposed to be bad luck if you're born female-but I think this is a Chinese lie because the Chinese, like the Mexicans, don't like their women strong.

My great-grandmother. I would've liked to have known her, a wild, horse of a woman, so wild she wouldn't marry. Until my great-grandfather threw a sack over her head and carried her off. Just like that, as if she were a fancy chandelier. That's the way he did it.

And the story goes she never forgave him. She looked out the window her whole life, the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow. I wonder if she made the best with what she got or was she sorry because she couldn't be all the things she wanted to be. Esperanza. I have inherited her name, but I don't want to inherit her place by the window.

At school they say my name funny as if the syllables were made out of tin and hurt the roof of your mouth. But in Spanish my name is made out of a softer something, like silver, not quite as thick as sister's name Magdalena--which is uglier than mine. Magdalena who at least--can come home and become Nenny. But I am always Esperanza. would like to baptize myself under a new name, a name more like the real me, the one nobody sees. Esperanza as Lisandra or Maritza or Zeze the X. Yes. Something like Zeze the X will do.