

## David Dominguez

### Pig

I pulled into Galdini Sausage at noon.  
The workers walked out of production  
and swatted away the flies desperate for pork.  
Pork gripped the men and was everywhere,  
in the form of blood, in the form of fat,  
and in pink meat stuck to the workers' shoes.  
Outside, eighty-pound boxes of pork  
melted under the sun, and as the sun worked,  
the blood and fat grew soft, and the boxes,  
lined with wax, became like thin paper soaked in oil.  
Mack trucks came in with unprocessed pork  
and took out chorizo, linguica, hot links, and sausage:  
German, Sweet, Breakfast, Hot, and Mild.  
One man stood straight up into the sky,  
closed his eyes, and with his thumb and forefinger,  
worked out bits of meat from his eyelashes  
glistening like black grease under the sun.  
The air conditioner in Mr. Galdini's office  
made the papers from his desk float onto the floor.  
He gave me a hard hat, a smock, an apron, and a hairnet.  
"You're in there," he said and lifted the blinds  
of a window that partitioned his office from production.  
He stood, gut pushed out, and his whole body  
swayed with ease as we watched the workers walk out,  
humpbacked under the unyielding memory of pig.

### Fingers

Because of the frozen meat and a silver ring,  
my index finger swelled and dimmed.  
The men held down my wrist and used a saw.  
I fought back the need to squirm and watched  
where the nicked-up teeth missed

and the scars began to form.  
 I remember the day Julio longed to go home.  
 Nothing passed time like work,  
 unconscious work when the bones pounded  
 and the muscles stretched.  
 So when the stuffer jammed, Julio jumped on a stool,  
 lowered half his body into the machine,  
 and when his thigh brushed against the go button,  
 the blade moved an inch  
 and sliced off his index finger.  
 I wiped the blood and thought about Julio,  
 how he did not cry out,  
 how he asked for my smock  
 and held his hand against his chest,  
 how he pushed away those who tried to help.  
 How the finger was never found.  
 But most of all, I thought about myself:  
 would I have screamed, could I have taken the pain,  
 walked outside to the employee pay phone,  
 and, with good hand still held steady, dialed 9-1-1?

## Mexicali

See it in the monsoon winds  
 that wrestle the night in the vacant lots.  
 In the *masa* slapped over the iron stoves  
 where the women and the *chisme* are always happy.  
 In the eye of a dead crow crying out,  
 "All life is delicate, all life is delicate."  
 At night, the wall disappears,  
 and the lights on top look like stars.

A man finds it in his chest and drums,  
*Boombababoombababoom*, and his woman  
 sways her hips, "*Ándale*," she says, "*ándale mi amor*."  
 Make it yours, lean into the ocotillo,  
 and beyond the spikes and the petals of fire,  
 below the surface of the desert and the black roots,  
 hold out your tongue and wait  
 for the arched tail of the scorpion.

## Empty Lot

My wife and I stand alone at the curb and stare  
 at the black numbers that mark our address.  
 We long for lumber, concrete,  
 copper tubing, stucco, and glass.  
 Empty fast-food cartons  
 tumble across the lot,  
 a crow pecks at the innards of a paper sack,  
 caws, dunks its head, and flies off,  
 a French fry in its beak,  
 this dirt the bird's home more than mine.  
 Twenty-five feet from the road,  
 my heel frames the front door, the entryway,  
 and dots a path toward  
 the kitchen and the gable window  
 where the sunlight will nestle on the sill,  
 on the backs of the dogs,  
 and in the cats' narrow eyes.  
 I want our house built:  
 a place for my wife to sit and read magazines,  
 to sip coffee at the table—  
 the books stacked, the door open,

ratcheting sprinkler head and water  
 the only sounds we hear.  
 Across the street, at four o'clock,  
 the construction workers open an ice chest  
 and sip beer in a truck.  
*Rancheras* bounce on their radio.  
 I take my wife and dance.  
 My fingers cup the curve  
 that slides below her ribs,  
 and she squeezes my hands so that  
 it stays there where later  
 I'll rest my chin as we lay  
 along the creek listening to the current.  
 The men across the street  
 turn up the music and watch us dance.  
 This is the only floor we own,  
 a floor covered with dirt clods, weeds, and the ants  
 vanishing into the sacred  
 hallways of home.

### Framework

At the lot, we walk through the entryway,  
 a dizzying lattice of pine 2x4s.  
 The air smells of timber and sawdust,  
 and the rooms are filled with  
 fog dripping onto the slab.  
 My wife doesn't like the mango I bought her.  
 It's soft, unsymmetrical, and the pulp is splotchy.  
 A wayward dove has built  
 her nest in my new house.  
 She has lodged her life among  
 beams where the roof will sit.  
 The nest's brilliance is delicate:  
 weeds, insulation, and twine.  
 I lean, macho-like, against a 2x4,  
 but it gives where nails have split the wood.

I fall and brush off my palms.  
 My wife wants tile, and we can't afford it.  
 I'd like to do one thing right:  
 I want to be the kind of man who changes  
 his oil and brakes in the driveway,  
 a man, toolbox at his side, who can sort through  
 junkyards and find an alternator,  
 a man who knows plumbing, electricity, and concrete.  
 Instead, skinny men from Mexico,  
 with fire and muscle in their forearms and fists,  
 maintain my cars and build my house.  
 I turn sharply and announce,  
 "I'll install the tile myself, 1,000 square feet."  
 My wife's eyes roll, and she points:  
 I've torn my shirt on a nail.

### Roof

At lunch, I go watch the Mexicanos  
 who are putting the ceiling on my house.  
 They don't like me the moment  
 I park at the curb.  
 Extension cords crisscross the slab.  
 I nod at the fellow with the saw.  
 He's watching my feet,  
 nervous I'll trip and pull  
 the diamond-cut teeth  
 through skin, veins, and bones.  
 They have names for me: *pocho*, *gringo*.  
 The one with the nail gun nods  
 but before I look away  
 he punches three-pennies into a board:  
 I can take a hint.  
 Days ago, I saw a nest in the beams.  
 Now it lies on the floor,  
 a dove's refuge smashed under a boot.

## Chicago Title

The rain is rising along the avenues  
 in downtown Selma, where my wife and I  
 are signing piles of paper thick as reams.  
 She is touching my wrist with her fingers  
 to stop me from going mad under the  
 office's fluttering fluorescent lights.  
 The print is impossibly tiny,  
 and I know I'll never read it all.  
 Still, I pretend to understand contracts,  
 raising my sweaty fist to my chin,  
 and squinting in a doubting way,  
 but all I need to see are "Terms."  
 What makes me madder is trying to get  
 how it works, how my signature ties  
 to my neck thirty years of debt,  
 how my name entitles me to the keys  
 that unlock the front door and lock out  
 the world rising and falling like water  
 along the busy sidewalks, so I give my  
 attention to a few other mysteries  
 as I sign away my life: how the rain  
 keeps me at an open window for hours,  
 how my wife still smells of her perfumes  
 even after she refuses to shower  
 and wastes the day under a blanket,  
 how all I need is hot chocolate and bread,  
 wine, grape leaves, and olives,  
 and how I enjoy snoring wet dogs at my feet.  
 Perhaps some mysteries are better left  
 unanswered: the joy of house keys sliding  
 across the table, or how my wife's fingers  
 touch my wrist on a rainy day in Selma.

## Cowboy

As I walk into the Verona Café, *I am profoundly happy.*  
 My work boots clunk with each step,  
 and at the cashier's counter, I order black coffee.  
 I can't help myself, so I inspect the floor's workmanship,  
 and at once I see how sloppily  
 each tile was installed along the bottom of the counter.  
 When I take my change, the employee sees  
 my hands are covered with scratches and dust  
 and says, "Thank you, Sir."  
 In the café's brightest corner,  
 an old man lowers his newspaper.  
 We exchange manly nods—  
 the workingman's code for, "Hello."  
 Today, I installed the last tiles in my new house,  
 tiles I had avoided because  
 they had to wrap around the doorframes,  
 tiles requiring templates and hours to cut,  
 but they, too, are done—  
 slapped with thinset and grout.  
 This afternoon, I love that I am wearing jeans,  
 that my T-shirt is gray,  
 that my leather work gloves are shoved into my back pocket,  
 and that the cold wind rushes against my face  
 as I merge onto Highway 99  
 and my Mustang roars.

**Elwood**

This morning, from the window,  
I watched our gardeners roll out  
4,000 square feet of hybrid Bermuda,

green as a jelly bean and so soft  
that I couldn't wait for it  
to tickle my wife's feet.

I dabbed my face with a towel  
and felt good, since there was  
no blood dotting my face.

put on a wrinkle-free shirt,  
grabbed my bag—lecture notes done,  
the week's reading fresh in my head—

and sipped coffee while I waited  
for the car to warm up,  
windows open, radio blasting.

But twelve miles from home,  
the temperature gauge shot up,  
and the steering wheel locked.

Roadside, I popped the hood,  
and at first, I thought a rat  
was caught in the fan belt,

but slowly the outline  
of a larger animal became  
distinct against the grease.

I leaned over the engine block,  
listened to its gasping,  
and thought, "I killed a fox or a coyote."

One hind leg was mangled and burned,  
and after I used the tire iron  
to work it free, after

it slipped onto the pavement,  
I knew it was my cat because  
of the dark markings along his back.

He clawed at the pavement,  
shocked over his shorn ear  
and his eye that had popped out.

I thought about the way he chased  
my wristwatch's reflection  
on the wall when I ate dinner.

Tire iron locked in my fist,  
I considered ending it there:  
who knows what mocker he was stalking

when gardeners came or how he was feeling  
when he saw tools drop from  
their trucks and fill the yard,

who knows what he was fearing  
when he jumped under my hood  
to ditch the pandemonium of strangers,

who knows how his day was going  
before I smiled at the morning  
and started the car?