

"Words" by [Luis J. Rodriguez](#)

The thing is I wanted to be a writer
even before I knew what writing was about.
I wanted to carve out the words
that swim in the bloodstream,
to press a stunted pencil onto paper
so lines break free like birds in flight—
to fashion words with hair,
lengths and lengths of it,
washed with dawn's rusting drizzle.

I yearned for mortar-lined words,
speaking in their own boasting tongues,
not the diminished, frightened stammering of my childhood,
but to shape scorching syllables with midnight dust.
Words that stood up in bed,
danced *merenques* and *cumbias*,
that incinerated the belly like a shimmering *habanera*.
Words with a spoonful of tears, buckshot, traces of garlic,
cilantro, aerosol spray, and ocean froth.
Words that guffawed, tarnished smooth faces,
and wrung song out of silence.

Words as languid as a woman's stride,
as severe as a convict's gaze,
herniated like a bad plan,
soaked as in a summer downpour.

I aspired to walk inside these words,
to manipulate their internal organs,
surrounded by veins, gray matter, and caesuras;
to slam words down like the bones of a street domino game—
and to crack them in two like lovers' hearts.