

My Name

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. I 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.

— Sandra Cisneros

Excerpted from 'All the Colors We Will See' by Patrice Gopo
Thomas Nelson, 2018

For My Husband Driving Down a Mountain

After Philando Castile's death in Saint Paul and Alton Sterling's in Baton Rouge, after too many men gone with skin the shade of yours—after all this, I waved goodbye. A week we'd spent here in the cool of these mountains, and the plans already in place for just me to remain. So I stood amid the perfume of sweet air and sharp evergreens, stood with my hand raised while you journeyed away. "Next week," I called after you. "I'll see you when you return next week." One hundred thirty miles between this mountain and our home.

Earlier that morning, after we wandered the short stretch of a small town's main road, after we popped into a furniture store that smelled of stained pine, after—yes, after—I spotted a row of black Sambo dolls perched on a dusty shelf—an image I wanted this world to burn long ago—after all this, I pulled open the door to an art gallery and heard a bell chime. The shop owner, with her silver hair and firm wrinkles etched into her pale face, ushered us through the entryway. Our senses took in the white walls, the cream shelves filled with orange and red glass, the scent of canvas and pottery, ink and paint.

197

PART III: SO THEN HOW DO WE LIVE?

“You must be newlyweds,” she said. You and I, we glanced at each other. You touched my arm, and your lips parted into that familiar grin.

“Almost eight years,” I replied.

“So young, so young,” and I think she wanted to reach her weathered hands for ours, but instead she gave us a tour of the art in that brightly lit place. When she found out that I am a writer, she tilted her head to the side. “So much to write about now.” Her words dissipated into a sigh, but I still heard all that she didn’t say.

The headlines say our country is in crisis, and I think about all that smolders and the temperatures that rise with the weariness of these recent days. She muttered, “Good people know good people, and that’s all that matters.” She blew us a kiss as we walked away, a breath of air that might ignite a spark or extinguish a flame.

After Philando Castile’s death in Saint Paul and Alton Sterling’s in Baton Rouge, after your car pulled away, I called out “Goodbye” to you. I can’t remember if I took my palm to my lips and gifted you a kiss across the empty space, but I tell myself that you caught all that I wanted to say. *Please, my love, keep your hands on the wheel, your registration close. Keep your speed under the limit and go straight home.*

I watched your car’s dusty bumper shrinking out of sight, the start of your spiral down that mountain, your return to the heat of our burning unknown. All I could do was reach out my open hand and wave.

Excerpted from ‘All the Colors We Will See’ by Patrice Gopo
Thomas Nelson, 2018