

Erika Ayón

I am my father's thirteenth child.  
I confess this to my friend Mehnaz  
over an iced Moroccan Tea at Coffee Bean.  
Mehnaz lights up, "Thirteen is a lucky number,  
that's the number of my parking space  
at Moorpark High School."

All my life I have felt unlucky.  
Feeling unlucky, I have gone to a *curandera*  
on Lankershim Blvd. to get a *limpia*.  
In my indigo blue bathing suit,  
the *curandera's* instructions—  
I bent over to kiss the feet of saints,  
sprinkled holy water on my skin,  
recited prayers for protection.

One October full moon,  
I stood outside my apartment building on Irolo,  
whispered wishes into a bottle of water,  
swung the water over my left shoulder.  
Esmeralda, the fortune teller had told me to do this  
after she read my cards, she saw my unlucky life.

If I had given the palm reader  
with the big plasma T.V. in his living room,  
more money when he asked.  
He would have told me  
which dark haired man to avoid.  
The lines of my palms revealed to him my sad life,  
his brown eyes uncovered in my palm a shallow pool,  
not an endless river of possibilities.

I want to tell Mehnaz  
that when she pulls into her parking space,  
when she steps out of her car,  
to think of me, to recite a prayer,  
dance ritualistically, dust her feet,  
she who studied Gods.

# Thirteenth Child

Erika Ayón emigrated from Mexico when she was five years old. She grew up in South Central, Los Angeles and graduated from UCLA with a B.A. in English. She is currently working on a collection of poetry entitled *Orange Lady*. The title stems from her childhood experience of selling oranges with her family on the streets of Los Angeles, in order to survive financially. She was selected as a 2009 PEN Emerging Voices Fellow. In her writing, Erika addresses issues such as poverty, race, cultural implications, gender, and the immigrant experience.

