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Mauricio

When a mother's child, just 18 years old,
tells her he is leaving home to explore

Europe, one country one year at a time,
starting with baby steps across England's

Abbey Road, then to the window pyramid
of The Louvre, followed by photographic

gags in front of the Tower of Pisa, then on
to any landmark that he could point to

on the evening news one day and say
to his children, "I was there before the attack"—

that he found this intrepid spirit inside him
at age 16 when the idea hit like a sore throat

riding in the backseat of a Volkswagen
overcrowded with drunk boys cruising

the streets of Monterrey, Nuevo León—
what else could a mother do, thinking her son

may never return, but slip into his backpack
a Christmas family photo, stuff his luggage

with packages of dehydrated noodles as her
feelings find their way down her cheek?

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Mauricio travels first up North to South Texas
with his visa. He stays in his aunt and uncle's

guest room for a few months until he earns
the money for one-way airfare cleaning offices

(cont—stanza break)

and yards. He polishes mirrors with Lemon
Pledge and cherry-wood desks with 409.

In the sticky-underarm weather of McAllen,
he mows lawns up and down Iris, Hibiscus,

and Japonica Avenues, regretting he finished
his bottle of Gatorade too soon. Three months

drags its heels into the turf. He wakes up
with backaches sleeping on a spring mattress,

his neck is a slice of bread the sun has toasted.
He's done with the scent of Windex.

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After he deplanes in London, Immigration eyes
him up and down, notices Mauricio is not student,

military, or tourist. It's off-season. Not even a camera
turns up in a baggage search. The officer resolves

the intention of this young man is to find work,
sending him back on the first flight to DFW.

In Dallas, he legally can't set foot on anything
as American as linoleum, but asks Customs

for permission to use the restroom. He's escorted,
even handed a toothbrush. When he's done,

the door won't open. He rattles the knob, pounds
on the door. No one answers. Behind him is a room

with a bench and cot. Messages in Mandarin,
Japanese, Korean ink the wall. Urdu and Farsi,

as well as languages from those exiled by Big Oil.
He understands only what's penned in Spanish.

"Soy Juan de Colombia. All I wanted was a chance
to write my name freely upon the air."