

NASTY CITY
Brenda Gutierrez

There was a city *that* lived near the shore. This city was not that type of city. There were no hopes, no dreams, no opportunities. Rather, it had George's Liquor on 18th Street where neighborhood kids could buy 25-cent brownies made of high fructose corn syrup and Red 40. There was Lupita, who wore a different baby-doll dress every day of the week, whose twirls lit up the block, whose father had veiny eyes and acidic breath and *one too many* after work. Over the years, the city tightened its grip around her spirit in an attempt to protect her innocence. She remained on that same block, lit up, now with razor-thin eyebrows and lips lined in Mocha Brown. Gone were her dresses and her faith, replaced by trembling hands and dilated pupils. There was Christina with an H, with the porcelain skin, with the tawny colored hair that swayed east to west. Waddling like a duck, she stuck her ass out to create an illusion. At night, she wore Vaquero Boots and claimed the city. During the day, she used her complexion's privilege to deny her ties to it. And who could forget Claudia? Who was too close to her uncle and too fast for 5th grade. She disappeared

one morning and was never heard of again. No milk cartons or lost posters for her. The city was blamed—as this sort of behavior was expected from the girls of Nasty City.

The city loved children. It housed two middle schools, one high school, and numerous elementary schools, but regardless of its efforts the money just wasn't there. There were no badges or crests conveying school pride. White and blue uniforms were used as tools for oppression. Outsiders didn't trust middle schoolers to dress themselves. Administrators feared sagging pants and miniskirts would spark a revolution or, worse, lead to ambition.