

Fire Escape

By María Luisa Arroyo

When you were three, you told Mama that you saw Jesus
on the fire escape. The cigarette she was smokin' fell
out her mouth, burned her thigh. Cussin' she grabbed
your face, threatened to burn your tongue
if you said such lies again. When Mama saw me watchin',
she told me I better not say nothin' to nobody or I
was gonna get it. That mornin', she took our cartoons
away, made us wash the walls with bleach. She nailed
the window shut that went to the fire escape. When I told her
she wasn't supposed to do that, she smacked me upside
the head, told me to shut up. And you stopped talkin', even to me.

On Monday, I said nothin' at school, just drew pictures
of Mama on fire. You with no tongue. Jesus.