

Señora X No More

Straight as a nun I sit.

My fingers foolish before paper and pen
hide in my palms. I hear the slow, accented echo

How are yu? I ahm fine. How are yu?
of the other women who clutch notebooks
and blush at their stiff lips resisting
sounds that float gracefully as
bubbles from their children's mouths.

My teacher bends over me, gently squeezes
my shoulders, the squeeze I give my sons,
hands louder than words.

She slides her arms around me:
a warm shawl, lifts my left arm
onto the cold, lined paper.

"Señora, don't let it slip away," she says
and opens the ugly, soap-wrinkled fingers
of my right hand with a pen like I pry open
the lips of a stubborn grandchild.

My hand cramps around the thin hardness.

"Let it breathe," says this woman who knows
my hand and tongue knot, but she guides
and I dig the tip of my pen into that white.

I carve my crooked name, and again at night
until my hand and arm are sore,

I carve my crooked name,
my name.

Pat Mora