

Oranges

Gary Soto

The first time I walked
 With a girl, I was twelve,
 Cold, and weighted down
 With two oranges in my jacket.
 5 December. Frost cracking
 Beneath my steps, my breath
 Before me, then gone,
 As I walked toward
 Her house, the one whose
 10 Porch light burned yellow
 Night and day, in any weather.
 A dog barked at me, until
 She came out pulling
 At her gloves, face bright
 With rouge. I smiled,
 Touched her shoulder, and led
 Her down the street, across
 A used car lot and a line
 Of newly planted trees,
 20 Until we were breathing
 Before a drugstore. We
 Entered, the tiny bell
 Bringing a saleslady
 Down a narrow aisle of goods.
 I turned to the candies
 Tiered like bleachers,
 And asked what she wanted—
 Light in her eyes, a smile
 Starting at the corners

30 Of her mouth. I fingered
 A nickel in my pocket,
 And when she lifted a chocolate
 That cost a dime,
 I didn't say anything.
 35 I took the nickel from
 My pocket, then an orange,
 And set them quietly on
 The counter. When I looked up,
 The lady's eyes met mine,
 40 And held them, knowing
 Very well what it was all
 About.

Outside,
 A few cars hissing past,
 45 Fog hanging like old
 Coats between the trees.
 I took my girl's hand
 In mine for two blocks,
 Then released it to let
 50 Her unwrap the chocolate.
 I peeled my orange
 That was so bright against
 The gray of December
 That, from some distance,
 55 Someone might have thought
 I was making a fire in my hands.