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Five Strands - poem

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Five Strands

Marianita Escamilla

Juarez cops handed them over—

five strands of hair

they formed a sort of a disc

similar to a communal host

were they shoved in,

placed carefully

or accidentally left there?

curiosities rarely get answers

my hand reached for the

tightly wrapped package

all cops carry evidence in sealed envelopes.

the claim

—to preserve the integrity of the material.

i found envelopes cut

down the ick

factor. Seriously, who wants to the touch torn

and soiled items of strangers?

this stranger?

thirteen-years old
raped
beaten
left naked
in a dumpster with those five strands of hair
in her mouth—an incident.

they ask, “how much pain did she feel?”
narcissism masked for concern.
what else can it be?
dead doesn’t change

before
the two Mexican cops came to my laboratory
I knew nothing of the murders happening
just fifteen minutes away
she
one of many...
so many

in 1998 five years had passed
since the first victim was noticed

13 years later

so many

more

before she opened her mouth,
releasing all she knew
nothing had ever been found.

time

exposure

wore traces of anyone away

save the victim

—not true—

many

others have gone missing

Las Desaparecidas

sounds so magical in Spanish doesn't it?

i've heard the cops de alla don't care

son pagados

asustados

cobardes,

incoetantes

i saw none of that.

only five years of sorrow,

death clung in their eyes

their noses held the

sweet

putrid scent
that chokes
they spoke of los cadaveres while focused
on a non-existent spot on the floor.

in their ears
muted screams
common for little kids who whack their heads
and parents who forced to identify daughters' corpses.

my skill only compared
found against known.
no magical piece of evidence existed.
spirits of the dead didn't guide me.

the frail, light brown strands
belonged to no one I compared them to
if it were that easy
the number of pink crosses
wouldn't rival the desert sand granules.

this is one of the many many reasons
i left my life of crime-fighting.

first there was no

cool spandex outfit, but no
real fighting happened.
we collected the artifacts of chaos.

i was tired of
sifting through the refuse.

i scrubbed my hands at the end of my days
in the lab
still, the aromas
latex
blood
sweat
lingered