



PERSPECTIVES *for a*
DIVERSE AMERICA

Central Text

Becoming Joey

This poem was written by Paul C. Gorski.

José's ten.

Looks six by size,
twenty in the eyes.

Down

the school-morning street

José ambles along

dotted lines of busses and cars
spitting exhaust like expletives.

They disturb his meditation,
a few final moments of peace.

José is frail but upright.

Smartly stitched hand-me-downs
hang from his slenderness.

Soles flop beneath battered shoes,
long worn but hanging on
if only by a lace.

José pauses in the schoolyard
where fairer kids laugh and scurry unaware
of this, his battle;
of this, his burden;
of these, his borderlands.

Behind him: cracked
sidewalks, frosted nights,
belonging.

Before him: playgrounds manicured,
classrooms heated against
some sorts of cold,
earnest lessons about a world
that doesn't see him.

Still José moves forward;
what feels in his stomach
a backward sort of forward.

Pausing in the doorway
José straightens his shirt,
trying to dust away
the stains of ancestry.

Pausing in the doorway
José clears his throat,
trying to spit away

his alien voice.

Only then,
becoming Joey,
he crosses
into school.

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