

## Praise for **THE FIVE WOUNDS**

‘The characters in this engrossing novel are created in luminous and memorable detail. Just as the pacing is perfect, so too are the tact and care with which each scene is made. Kirstin Valdez Quade, by concentrating on the truth of small moments, has brought a whole world into focus’

Colm Tóibín, author of *House of Names*

‘Kirstin Valdez Quade writes with exquisite precision about the fragility and resilience of the Padilla family. Valdez Quade is attentive to both the trembling shadows and epic crescendos of her characters’ shared and private lives. I loved *The Five Wounds*, which reminded me that growing pains are not confined to adolescence, and that people can be newborn at any age. Even its most excruciating moments are charged with a luminous, pitiless compassion’

Karen Russell, author of *Swamplandia!*

‘An unputdownable novel, *The Five Wounds* takes my breath away with its intimate, humorous and heart-aching portrayal of a New Mexican family. Kirstin Valdez Quade can make a reader laugh and break a reader’s heart in the same breath, and she leaves us, by the end of the novel, in awe of the dazzling power of her storytelling’

Yiyun Li, author of *Must I Go*

‘*The Five Wounds* is brilliant! The story is bountiful and so incredibly well crafted – a beautiful braid of the life-cycle within a family. It captures both the strength and fragility of relationships and existence and the resilience and great power of love and belief. It is a novel about faith in the largest sense of the word. Each page is packed with detail and the most beautiful language – and images and characters that will remain part of our lives’

A. M. Homes, author of *May We Be Forgiven*

‘In this cruel and divisive era, Kirstin Valdez Quade has brought healing and regeneration with *The Five Wounds*. It is bracing and wise, and it breaks us in the best ways. Then builds back up again. It should find many grateful readers’

Luis Alberto Urrea, author of *House of Broken Angels*

‘I don’t remember ever reading a novel as vibrant and warm as *The Five Wounds* by Kirstin Valdez Quade. Just a few pages in, I felt like I intimately knew the characters, and cared about them as if they were family members. It’s both heartbreaking and a joy to read!’

Lara Vapnyar, author of *Divide Me by Zero*

‘With deep empathy, fierce intelligence and subtle wit, Kirstin Valdez Quade has crafted an indelible portrait of a family living in precarity. The characters in *The Five Wounds* are so vivid, their struggles, failures and grasping efforts towards love and redemption so finely wrought, and each page full of such immaculate prose, that I read this novel with ever-increasing breathless urgency’

Phil Klay, author of *Redeployment*

# THE FIVE WOUNDS

KIRSTIN VALDEZ QUADE



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*Part I*

# SEMANA SANTA

This year Amadeo Padilla is Jesus. The hermanos have been preparing in the dirt yard behind the morada.

This is no silky-haired, rosy-cheeked, honey-eyed Jesus, no Jesus-of-the-children, Jesus-with-the-lambs. Amadeo is muscled, hair shaved close to a scalp scarred from teenage fights, roll of skin where skull meets neck.

Amadeo is building the cross out of heavy rough oak instead of pine. He's barefoot like the other hermanos, who have rolled their cuffs and sing alabados. They have washed their white pants, braided their disciplinas the old way, from the thick fibers of yucca leaves, mended rips in the black hoods they will wear to ensure their humility in this reenactment. The Hermano Mayor—Amadeo's skinny grand-tío Tíve, who surprised them all when he chose his niece's lazy son—plays the pito, and the thin piping notes rise.

Today Amadeo woke with the idea of studding the cross with nails to give it extra weight. He holds the hammer with both hands high above his head, brings it down with a crack. The boards bounce, the sound strikes off the outside wall of the morada and, across the alley, the Idle Hour Cantina.

Amadeo has broken out in a sweat. Amadeo sweats, but not usually from work. He sweats when he eats, he sweats when he drinks too much. Thirty-three years old, same as Our Lord, but Amadeo is not a man with ambition. Even his mother will tell you that, though it breaks her heart to admit it. Yolanda still cooks for him, setting a plate before him at his place at the table.

This afternoon, though, even Amadeo's tattoos seem to strain with

his exertion, and he's seeing himself from outside and above. A flaming Sacred Heart beats against his left pectoral, sweat drips from the point of a bloodied dagger on his bicep, and the roses winding around his side bloom against the heat of his effort. On his back, the Guadalupana glitters brilliantly, her dress scarred with the three vertical cuts of the sellos, the secret seals of obligation. The lines, each the length of a man's hand, are raised and pink and newly healed, evidence of his initiation into the hermandad.

Though Amadeo has lived in Las Penas his whole life, today he sees the village anew: the lines are sharper, the colors purer. The weeds along the edge of the fence, the links of the fence itself, the swaying tops of the cottonwood trees—everything is in preternatural focus. The morada is lit by the sun sinking orange at his back, the line sharp between cinderblock and sky. He brings the hammer down, hitting each nail true, enjoying the oiled rotation of his joints, the fatigue in his muscles. He feels righteous and powerful, his every movement predetermined. He feels born for the role.

Then he pounds the last nail, and he's back in his body, and the hermanos are wrapping up, heading home.



WHEN AMADEO PULLS UP the gravel drive to the house, his daughter Angel is sitting on the steps, eight months pregnant. She lives in Española with her mom. He hasn't seen her in more than a year, but he's heard the news from his mother, who heard it from Angel.

White tank top, black bra, gold cross pointing the way to her breasts in case you happened to miss them. Belly as hard and round as an horno. The buttons of her jeans are unsnapped to make way for its fullness, and also to indicate how this happened in the first place. Her birthday is this week, falls on Good Friday. She'll be sixteen.

"Shit," Amadeo says, and yanks the parking brake. This last week was the most important week in Jesus's life. This is the week everything happened. So Amadeo's mind should be trained on sacrifice and resurrection, not his daughter's teen pregnancy.

She must not see his expression, because she gets up, smiles, and waves with both hands. The rosary swings on his rearview mirror, and Amadeo watches as, beyond it, his daughter advances on the truck, stomach outthrust. She pauses, half turns, displays her belly.

She's got a big gold purse with her, and a duffel bag, he sees, courtesy of Marlboro. Angel's hug is straight on, belly pressing into him.

"I'm fat, huh? I barely got these pants and already they're too small."

"Hey." He pats his daughter's back gingerly between her bra straps, then steps away. "What's happening?" he says. It's too casual, but he can't afford to let her think she's welcome, not during Passion Week, and with his mother away.

"Ugh. Me and Mom got in a fight, so I told her to drive me here." Her tone is light. "I didn't know where you and Gramma were. I've been here, like, two hours, starving my head off. Pregnant people need to eat. I almost broke in just to make a sandwich. Don't you guys check your phones?"

Amadeo hooks his thumbs in his pockets, looks up at the house, then back at the road. The sun is gone now, the dusk a nearly electric blue.

"A fight?" In spite of himself, Amadeo takes some pleasure in Angel's indignation at her mother. Marissa has always made him feel insufficient.

"I can't even. Whatever," she says with conviction. "What me and the baby need right now is a support system. That's what I told her."

Amadeo shakes his head. "I'm real busy," he says, like an actor portraying regret. "Now's not a good time."

Angel doesn't look hurt, just interested. "Why? You got a job or something?"

She lifts her duffel and begins to walk toward the door, swaying under the weight of luggage and belly. "My mom's not here," he calls. He's embarrassed to tell her the real reason he wants her gone, embarrassed by the fervor that being a penitente implies.

"Where'd Gramma go?" There's real worry in her voice. She holds the screen open with her hip, waiting for him to unlock the door.

"Listen, it's a busy week." He rushes this next part, his breath short. "I'm carrying the cross this year. I'm Jesus."



“Uh, okay. She’ll be back soon, right?”

Yolanda took her vacation after the end of the legislative session, right before Holy Week, exactly when Amadeo needs her most. “Maybe I’ll just stay out there forever,” she told him lightly as she packed. “I love Vegas. The shows, the lights, the commotion.”

“She didn’t say when she’d be back. End of next week, probably.”

Angel heaves her duffel and purse on the kitchen floor with a dramatic sigh, and only then does it occur to Amadeo that he should have carried the bags in for her. But she doesn’t seem to notice. She’s still talking.

“I told my mom, ‘Whatever, I’m going to Gramma’s, then. *She* loves me.’”



THAT NIGHT Angel chatters about food groups as she makes dinner—a can of chili dumped over an underdone squash and a package of frozen cheese bread—then takes over the TV. She talks to her belly. “See, baby? That heifer is going *home*. You can’t be like that to your girls.”

Amadeo sits at the other end of the couch, strangely nervous. He tries to remember the last time he was alone with his daughter, but can’t. Two or three Christmases ago, maybe; he remembers sitting awkwardly in this same room asking Angel about her favorite subjects while Yolanda was at the grocery store or the neighbors’.

He wipes his palms along his thighs, works his tongue inside his mouth. Frozen-eyed porcelain dolls stare at Amadeo from Yolanda’s corner cabinet, where they sit in their frilly dresses on shelves beside souvenir bells and shot glasses. With a sudden stitch in his gut, Amadeo thinks of Tío Tive. What will he say about Angel being here?—the fruit of his sin, laden with sin of her own.

“So,” Amadeo says. “Your mom’s probably going to want you back soon, no?”

“I got to teach her she’s not the only one in my life. She’s got to learn to respect me.”

Amadeo kneads his thigh. He can’t tell her to leave. Yolanda would

kill him. He just wishes his mom were here. Yolanda and Angel are pretty close; Yolanda sends the girl checks, twenty-five here, fifty there, takes her out to dinner in Española or Santa Fe, and a couple times a year the two go shopping at the outlets.

"Maybe you could come back when my mom gets home." A needle of guilt slides into his side.

Angel doesn't seem to have heard him. "I mean, the woman's all preaching to me about how I messed up and why couldn't I learn from her mistake, but what am I going to do now, huh? I mean, I *get* it: I ruined her stupid life. Fine. But if she's going to pretend she's all mature, she should actually act mature."

Amadeo should call his sister, get her to come take Angel to Albuquerque to stay with her and the girls. Saving the day—that's right up Valerie's alley. But he isn't talking to Valerie now, hasn't since Christmas.

Angel looks like her mother, the same glossy, thick hair and high color, though her features aren't as fine as Marissa's. Amadeo's genes, he supposes. Amadeo wonders if Marissa acted this young back then. Marissa was sixteen, Amadeo eighteen, but they felt old. Her parents had been angry and ashamed, but had thrown a baby shower for the young couple anyway. Amadeo had enjoyed being at the center of things: congratulated by her relatives and his, handed tamales and biscochitos on paper plates by old women who were willing to forgive everything in exchange for a church wedding. He stood to sing for them, nodding at Marissa: "This is dedicated to my baby girl." *Bendito, bendito, bendito. Los ángeles cantan y daban a Dios.* They all clapped, old ladies dabbing their eyes, Yolanda blowing kisses across the room. Amadeo had felt virtuous, responsible for his girlfriend and unborn child.

Later, of course, there was no wedding, no moving in together. Angel was born and learned to walk and talk, with no help from Amadeo. The old women shook their heads, resigned; they should have known better than to expect anything from Amadeo, from men in general. "Even the best of them aren't worth a darn," his grandmother used to say. "Except you, hijito," she'd add kindly, if she noticed Amadeo in the room. "You're worth a darn."

By the time Angel was five, he was relieved at how easily the obligation slipped from his shoulders. All it took was for him to stop answering Marissa's calls—fewer than you'd expect—and he was a free man.

As though answering a question, Angel says, "I didn't drop out of school for reals. I'm doing this whole program and I'm going to graduate and everything, so don't worry." She looks at Amadeo, expectant.

Amadeo realizes he forgot to worry, forgot even to wonder. "Good. That's good." He gets up, rubs his shorn head with both hands. "You got to have school."

She's still looking at him, demanding something: reassurance, approval. "I mean, I'm serious. I'm going to graduate." Then she's off, talking about college and success and following her dreams, echoing what she hears at the teen parenting program she attends. "Brianna, my teacher? She says I got to invest in myself if I'm going to give him a good life. You won't see me like my mom, doing the same old secretary job for ten years, just trying to snag herself an architect. I'm doing something big." She turns to her belly. "Isn't that right, hijito?"

This depresses the hell out of Amadeo. He opens a beer and guzzles half of it before he remembers who he is this week. "Fuck," he says, disgusted, and pours it down the sink.

Angel looks up at him from the couch. "You better clean up your mouth. He can hear every little thing you say."

"Fuck," says Amadeo, because it's his house, but he says it quietly, and thinks about the sound passing through his daughter's body to the child inside. He stands. "I got to go."



EVERY NIGHT OF LENT, the hermanos have gathered in the morada to pray the Rosary under Tío Tive's watchful eye, and every Friday they meditate on the Stations of the Cross. On their knees, heads bowed. There are nine hermanos, and, with the exception of Amadeo, they're all over seventy. Tío Tive is the oldest, eighty-seven, still going strong.

"Jesus prayed," recites Al Martinez. "Abba, Father, all things are possible to you; remove this cup from me." Amadeo likes Al. He's a

chatty big guy and gets teary when he talks about this or that grandchild. Not long ago, he retired from long-haul driving, and his shoulders are rounded from a career spent leaning over a steering wheel toward a horizon.

The cinderblock walls are painted white, and a few benches face front. The only thing worth looking at is the crucifix. This Christ is not like the Christ in the church: high-gloss complexion, chaste beads of blood where crown meets temple, expression exquisite, prissy, a perfect balance of compassion and suffering and—yes, it's there—self-pity. No, this Christ on the morada wall is ancient and bloody. There is violence in the very carving: chisel marks gouge belly and thigh, leave fingers and toes stumpy. The contours of the face are rough, ribs sharp. Someone's real hair hangs limply from the statue's head.

Each night a different hermano says the Holy Mysteries, and together they intone the responses. This is Amadeo's favorite part, when all their voices merge in a rumbling low current, the same predictable rise and fall. Tonight, though, with Angel's arrival, he's edgy and distracted. Amadeo considers calling her mom to get her, but at the thought of explaining to Marissa about the procession, he rejects the idea. "You can't take care of your daughter because *why*?" He can hear her scorn.

He watches the praying men: Tío Tíve, in the diabetic shoes he gets subsidized from the VA, his lips trembling; Frankie Zocal, blue veins pulsing his lids; Shelby Morales, his gray ponytail draped over his shoulder like a girl's.

"The soldiers clothed him in a purple cloak, and plaiting a crown of thorns, they put it on him," says Al, clear and low, as if willing himself to hold a blaze of feeling in check.

Nine men is a far cry from the old days, Al explained to Amadeo a few weeks ago as they stepped into the heavy dusk. In earlier generations, membership rolls, even for an hermandad this deep in the mountains, could be in the hundreds. Back in those days, when one priest was shared among many far-flung isolated communities, the hermandads weren't just centers of worship, but mutual aid societies, political councils, community centers. They buried the dead.

"We got your tío to thank for the hermandad. He really brought it back," Al Martinez said. "Even when my dad was a kid, the tradition was dying out. There wasn't nothing left of the old morada. But Tíve bought the gas station, fixed it up, reminded us what we once had. It's the one good thing to come out of his boy's passing."

The morada isn't much to look at. Outside there's the dark skeleton of a sign on a pole, the bright plastic panels long gone, and two dead pumps. The plate-glass window has been covered in matte beige house paint left over from a long-ago job. Occasionally strangers will pull in for gas and look around, confused by the trucks parked in front, before heading straight through the village and away.

"Maybe ours isn't as nice as the moradas in Truchas and Abiquiú and Trampas," Al Martinez said. "Maybe it doesn't show up on no postcards. Las Penas doesn't have one scrap of charm, and I say, good. They can have their sculptors and natural-food stores. Let the tourists go to Taos."

First the Rosary, then silent individual prayer. It's meant to last an hour, but you'd be surprised how long that feels, how quickly supplication and penitence and entreaty get old. Within a minute or two, knees are wincing, kneecaps grinding between concrete and bone, and by the time the Rosary is over, the legs have gone numb. Toenails ache, pressed against the floor.

Amadeo thinks of his daughter alone in the house. She could be up to anything: going through his belongings, having friends over. Entertaining boys, even.

Amadeo falters on the Apostles' Creed. He opens his eyes and looks at Tíve, and sure enough, the old man has him in his disapproving gaze. Amadeo clamps his eyes shut.

"Amen," intone the hermanos, and the Rosary is over before Amadeo even gets into it.

Silent prayer is the most difficult part. *Please, God*, Amadeo thinks, then loses the thread. His knees are pulverized. He wonders if he's doing permanent damage. Outside, evening sounds: a car passing, the squawk of a night bird, the ping of moths against the painted-over windows.

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AMADEO'S ENTRADA—his initiation and first audience with the hermanos—took place five weeks ago, on Ash Wednesday.

"At sundown, you knock," Tíve had prepped him, when they met for lunch at Dandy's Burgers in Española. His voice was low, and Amadeo threw a glance at the family at the table next to them. They weren't paying attention, though. A boy about six or seven with ketchup on his pants was trying to eat his hamburger while his mother kept getting in his face with a napkin. Outside, Tíve's dog Honey, a rust-colored Doberman, watched them through the window, one pale eyebrow raised, her undocked ears giving her a bat-like aspect.

"Three times you knock." Tíve demonstrated on the table, scowling from under the brim of his trucker's cap.

Amadeo's mother adores her uncle. She has ideas of what a family should be, and according to these ideas, Tíve's role is lonely, lovable curmudgeon. Mostly, Amadeo suspects, Tíve wants to be left alone, and not the way old people in TV movies want to be left alone, secretly waiting for some misguided young person to come along so that they might save each other. Tíve may be old, but he has no desire to spin yarns or reminisce or impart wisdom.

"Okay." Amadeo nodded agreeably. He was hungry, but didn't want to unwrap his hamburger first. Discreetly, he popped a fry into his mouth.

His great-uncle glared. Shriveled as he was, dude could be scary. "You fast and go to Mass that day, you hear? From here on out, you need to be regular with Mass. And confession, too." Tíve handed him a brochure on the Rosary. "You know the words, right?"

"Doesn't it mean more if I make up my own prayers?" Amadeo flapped the brochure. "Aren't these just pre-memorized?" His uncle's look of disgust shamed him.

Tíve reached into the breast pocket of his flannel shirt and handed Amadeo a folded piece of notebook paper. "Learn it good," he said. "And don't go talking about it to no one. These are secrets."

Amadeo squinted at the unsteady block letters that had been copied out with a blunt pencil. It looked like a poem with many stanzas, and Amadeo had a flash of his fifth-grade language arts textbook, and a long rhyming poem about a butterfly that he'd liked to read to himself after school, whispering the words in his room, enjoying the rhythm, the inevitability of the sounds. *Sky, eye, why*. Stupid as fuck.

Midway down the page was a grease smudge, and Amadeo pictured his great-uncle frowning over the paper under the dim kitchen light, the cold remains of a sad, solitary dinner of scrambled eggs beside him.

"Hey, wait. This is in Spanish," Amadeo said.

"Oh, hell," Tíve muttered. He began unwrapping his burger, as if giving up.

Even Yolanda doesn't speak Spanish well, though she, at least, can follow along with the telenovelas she watches weekday nights on her bedroom television. "I could do a much better job with English," Amadeo offered, then, at his uncle's incredulity, corrected himself. "I mean, I'm kidding. I can definitely learn it. I did Spanish in high school."

The first part of the ritual was a call-and-response.

*Novicio: Dios toca en esta misión, las puertas de tu clemencia.* God knocks at this mission, on the gates of his mercy.

*Hermanos: Penitencia, penitencia, si quieres tu salvación.* Penance, penance, if you want salvation.

"Go on. Practice," said Tíve, and Amadeo, suddenly shy, spoke his lines. He was surprised when, in reply, his great-uncle began to sing, his voice gravelly and beautiful. At the table next to them, the little boy paused in his chewing, his cheeks full, and watched.

*To enter this morada, place the right foot, praising the most sweet names of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.*

Once he crossed the threshold, Amadeo was to kneel before the old men who were to be his brothers, and ask for forgiveness.

"Then you cut me?"

"You take the oath first."

"And then?"

Tíve gave an almost imperceptible nod.

“Deep?” Amadeo whispered, keeping his voice steady.

His great-uncle shrugged. “Not too deep. Go on, do your lines.”

*Pardon me, my brothers, if in anything I have offended you or given scandal.*

And Tíve sang in reply. *May God pardon you who are already pardoned by me.*

Amadeo’s eyes filled, an abrupt sadness caught in his throat. He looked away, embarrassed.

Tío Tíve cleared his own throat. “Be ready.”

There were practical reasons for the sellos—the three vertical cuts that were going to be made in his back—when he began whipping himself, the blood would flow from the wounds, so the skin wouldn’t swell or bruise.

At first Amadeo had enjoyed the prospect of kneeling before the sangrador who would mark him. On the morning of Ash Wednesday, though, his courage began to fail. All day, he thought of the sellos, and his knees weakened.

He shaved for the entrada (though he didn’t shower again, because he wanted to preserve the smudge of ash on his forehead, proof to his great-uncle that he’d gone to Mass), put on a new plaid shirt still stiff from the package, dress shoes, splashed cologne on his neck. Even so, he could smell the unpleasant tang of his sweat.

In the end, just before presenting himself at the morada door, Amadeo had buckled to his fear: though he’d fasted all day, he dug a bottle of vodka out of his sweater drawer, broke the seal on it, and took deep gulps.

The entrada, then, was a blur of impressions. The hermanos’ song, cresting and falling like waves. The secret oath, binding him for life. And the pedernal: obsidian with a knife-sharp edge, a dangerous crescent moon. Al Martinez’s big hand warm and steady on his shoulder, the man’s low assurance. “They’ll be shallow, son. Deep breath.” Amadeo’s heart like a steady, too-loud drumbeat, his sides slick with cold sweat. And, as the blade slid into the skin of his back, Amadeo’s swelling sense of his own falseness.



NOW, FINALLY, Tíve crosses himself. “All right,” he says irritably. “Amen.” Amadeo stands, legs needling. Around him the hermanos gather themselves. Some will talk quietly in the parking lot about this or that, trying out their rusty voices, and others will hurry to their families, kiss their wives, take their places on the couch in front of their TVs.

Angel is waiting for him at home, so Amadeo lingers. Tíve’s Doberman Honey is beside herself with joy to see the men emerge, and tears around the lot, barking her head off, her long, narrow muzzle pointed to the sky. Based on this particular specimen, it’s hard to believe the breed is a fierce one; Honey is relentlessly attention-seeking and ill-mannered, her expression demented and eager. Her reddish fur is dull, as if she’d once been a normal black or brown dog and had been left to fade in the sun. She pushes her head under Tíve’s hand and wags her tail nub furiously.

“Buddy,” says Al Martinez in the doorway, clapping a hand on Tío Tíve’s skinny shoulder. Tíve flinches. “I want to show you Elena’s newest—my second granddaughter!” He’s already pulling his phone out of his pocket, expertly swiping at the screen. “See her?”

Tíve peers at the photo, and Amadeo also cranes to see a charmless, purple-faced infant with a frothy lace headband strapped around her wrinkled head. “Well,” Tíve says.

“Oh, she’s a beauty. Got her grandma’s pretty mouth.” Al brings the phone close to his own face, examines it blissfully, then tucks it into his pocket. He clears his throat. “Listen, buddy, Isaiah, my youngest, wants to join us. He wants to be an hermano. And since we’re taking novicios”—he angles his head at Amadeo—“he’d be a great candidate. He wants to get back to his history.”

“No,” says Tíve. “No more novicios.”

“But Tíve. He’s a good boy, a manager at Lowe’s. Just turned forty. We need young people. You said so yourself.”

“No,” says Tíve. “It’s not the right time.”

Anger flashes across Al's face, then disappointment. He glances again at Amadeo, seems about to say something, then says quietly, "Please, brother. Isaiah needs this. I did good with Elena, but Isaiah is bad into chiva, in and out of rehab and all that, even robbed his sister once, took the computer and TV and everything. We don't know what to do with ourselves. He's doing better now, but it'd give him comfort, give him something bigger than him. He thinks it could save him, and I do, too."

"You're not bringing that poison into the morada. Hell no." Tíve heads for his truck, his walk stooped and uneven.

"Harsh," Amadeo says, but he can't deny feeling pleased, because he *was* chosen, and not just for the hermandad, but for the most important role there is. "His son Elwin OD'd."

"I know." For a long moment, Al continues to gaze after Tíve, his expression troubled. Quietly, Al says, "In my grandpa's day, there was a Jesus who asked for nails. Best Jesus they ever had."

Amadeo swallows. "Seriously? He actually got nailed to the cross? With real nails?"

Al Martinez nods. "That's some sacrifice, huh? Think of it." He slowly turns his hand, one way and then the other, then touches the center of his palm.

"Who was he?" Amadeo has the sense that he is teetering on the edge of a great mystery. Around him, the night is huge.

Al shrugs. "I just know what my dad told me his dad told him. I just know he did it." He tosses his keys lightly and heads to his car.

Amadeo stands alone in the deserted lot. After that, a man would never be the same again. He imagines the scene, as he always imagines the olden days, in black and white: the man's steadfast expression as the nail pierces his flesh, the searing light that fills him. The gathered people fall to their knees.



AT SIX THIRTY in the morning on Holy Wednesday, Amadeo wakes to the gurgle and hiss of pipes in the wall near his head. He flops over in his

limp bed, tries not to think about Angel. Christ's pain, he reminds himself. Think of that. Each night, Amadeo practices his expression in the bathroom mirror after he showers, water running down his forehead. He spreads his arms, makes the muscles in his face tighten and fall, tries to learn the nuances of suffering. Now, lying in bed, he tries again, but his face is stiff as tire rubber. He tries to train his mind on that long-ago man, who with a few nails, made something real.

It makes him queasy to think of Angel, queasier to think about whoever got her this way. This is not a detail that made it into the story Amadeo heard from his mother, but he doesn't need facts to picture it: some cholo dealing chiva from the window of his lowrider.

When he wakes again, Angel is looming over him, prodding his shoulder. "Dad? Can you drive me to school? You need to get up."

Amadeo murmurs something into his pillow as she shuts the door. Later, faintly, he hears her call his name again, but the sound doesn't break through the surface of his sleep.

When he wakes, it's after ten, and the house is sunny and empty. He still has two hours before Mass. Angel has left a note on the table: *Got a ride with Tío Tive*. No signature, no *XOX*. Guilt sits heavy in his gut. He eats the cold eggs and bacon Angel has left out for him, and then, because that jumpy, awful feeling won't go away, he cracks open a beer.