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First English Word

My happy fingers choose
a parrot green
for the parrot's feathers,
a saffron red for its beak and
the ring on its neck,
a brown a bit too dark
for its claws
and a lighter shade of it
for the tree branch.

As the jealous eyes of
my new companions
pass around resentments,
my teacher loosens
the smiles bundled and kept
safe in her neat, dry,
sophisticated mind,
soothing my baffled first-day
at kindergarten.

My fingers tremble a bit
as I remember the first rule
of having to speak in
the foreign language,
and the warning that
the fair face smiling now
owns a hand that
won't spare the rod.

My legs tremble too,
my parrot greens
and saffron reds
are lost in the borders,
spoiling the bird-beauty,
smudging a tender mindscape.

Salty sweat-drops flow
through shortened black hair,
fear drips down the brows,

as the needs of a
little mind
and body
drown in humid,
deep silences.

The ice-candy seller
rings his sweet bicycle bell,
twenty-five pairs of
child eyes in stifled longing
dart out the cage-windows,
husky lady-voice
rises above surprises
in the local dialect,
summoning the seller.

Buying but only one ice-candy,
she starts to eat it all by herself
as the wide-eyed miseries
watch in clear shock
and exasperation.

The saffron red ice-candy
meets the painted lips,
melts sweet and cold
in the English-speaking mouth,
what remains wet and sticky
in her slender fingers
rises in the air as she declares,
“we learn something new
today—see, these are called
sticks, S-T-I-C-K-S”