

Border Boy

By Alberto Ríos

I grew up on the border and though I left
I have brought it with me wherever I've gone.

Its line guides me, this long, winding thread of memory.
The border wasn't as big as they say—

It fit neatly behind my eyes and between my ears—
It guides me still, I know, but it is not a compass.

It is not a place out there but a place in here.
I catch on its barbed wire in both places.

It is a line I step over and a ledge I duck under.
I have looked underneath its skirts, and it has caught me—

Many times. We're old friends and we play the game well.
When someone says *border*, now, or *frontera*, or *the line*.

La línea, or *the fence*, or whatever else
We name the edge and the end of things—

I hear something missing in the words,
The *what it all used to be*. Its name does not include its childhood.

I grew up liking the border and its great scar,
Its drama always good for a story the way scars always are.

A scar is the place where the hurting used to be.
A scar the heroic signature of the healed.

The border is not a scar. Instead, it is something we keep picking at,
Something that has no name.

The border I knew was something with a history.
But this thing now, it is a stranger even to itself.

Alberto Rios, "Border Boy" from *Not go away is my name*. Copyright © 2020 by Alberto Rios.
Reprinted by permission of Copper Canyon Press, www.coppercanyonpress.org.
Source: *Not go away is my name* (2020)