Self-Inquiry before the Job Interview

By Gary Soto

Did you sneeze?
Yes, I rid myself of the imposter inside me.

Did you iron your shirt?
Yes, I used the steam of mother’s hate.

Did you wash your hands?
Yes, I learned my hygiene from a raccoon.

I prayed on my knees, and my knees answered with pain.
I gargled. I polished my shoes until I saw who I was.
I inflated my résumé by employing my middle name.

I walked to my interview, early,
The sun like a ring on an electric stove.
I patted my hair when I entered the wind of a revolving door.
The guard said, For a guy like you, it’s the 19th floor.

The economy was up. Flags whipped in every city plaza
In America. This I saw for myself as I rode the elevator,
Empty because everyone had a job but me.

Did you clean your ears?
Yes, I heard my fate in the drinking fountain’s idiotic drivel.

Did you slice a banana into your daily mush?
I added a pinch of salt, two raisins to sweeten my breath.

Did you remember your pen?
I remembered my fingers when the elevator opened.

I shook hands that dripped like a dirty sea.
I found a chair and desk. My name tag said my name.
Through the glass ceiling, I saw the heavy rumps of CEOs.
Outside my window, the sun was a burning stove,
All of us pushing papers
To keep it going.

Source: Poetry
Gary Soto has been a leading figure in Chicano literature since the 1977 publication of his first book of poems, The Elements of San Joaquin. In this and subsequent works of poetry and prose he describes his working-class upbringing in Fresno, California and the travails, hopes, and dreams of migrant laborers and other Mexican Americans.

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