

## Ties That Bind

Thirty-two stories shake like Jello.  
Source of the blast not yet known.  
Then smoke appears, giving way the location.  
Precious minutes wasted, calling the daycare - on a useless phone.  
Filled with fear.  
Out of shape.  
Running towards the commotion.  
Not wanting to see what there was to find.  
Unfamiliar emotion, my very being threatened.  
I ran.  
I panted.  
I listened to the sound glass makes - when it grinds  
beneath your shoes.  
“Where are the babies?” this mother’s cry.  
“There are no more babies,” came the cruel answer.  
Despair.  
Desperation.  
Decided denial.  
An ambulance wails.  
The sound goes unnoticed.  
The babies are here! Round the corner, unseen.  
There she is.  
She lives.  
The blood has clotted in her baby-fine hair.  
New spring dress forever stained.  
Shock.  
Fear.  
Disbelief.  
Relief.  
How similar they all seem now.  
Her blood mingling with that of the transient that holds her.  
His temporary room at the YMCA now part of history.  
He smiles when he realizes I am her mother.  
More meaningful words have never been spoken  
than in that silent expression.  
The transition is made from his loving arms to mine.  
Would I have cared so genuinely for this man yesterday?  
A good Samaritan offers his cell phone.  
Dazed, actually thinking it would work.  
His starched, white shirt is in shreds.  
Blood covers his right side.  
The collar, still crisp on the left, hangs limp  
with red on the right.  
Why am I noticing this? What’s wrong with me?  
Help me, Lord.  
The tree is on fire.  
Cars exploding.  
All unseen.  
The contrast of this man’s collar

forever imprinted in my mind.  
No tears.  
Just the clinging of my baby.  
Head nestled into the hollow of my neck.  
Gentle cooing.  
Attempts to soothe.  
All at once, it occurs to me that I am making the noise.  
Is it working?  
Am I soothing her?  
Am I soothing me?  
The towel wrapped around her legs is soaked.  
It sticks to my skin.  
I pull it away from my arm and realize  
it is her dried blood that holds us together.  
Ties that bind.

*Barbara Hernandez*