Forty-Three
by Erika L. Sanchez

The moment before death the air --- inexplicably --- tastes of wet horse. The chest expands and something unspools like wet vines. In this land of child brides and teenage assassins, a bus full of students dissolves into the mountain mist. A retinue of beheaded journalists mouth clues while the young president delivers platitudes. But what do they matter? The students don’t know the kilos of heroin stored below them. A boy of 18, eyes gray as bathwater, charts a man’s face under his black mask. Why even bother? the boy wonders. The night’s only witnesses -- the stars, an ocelot, a single strand of hair caught in a barbed wire. Even the zopilotes won’t eat the glut of the unsayable. The blood-birds hiss and grunt while a man with pointed teeth whistles a love song. Why waste time with metaphors? The body is kindling. The body is a plastic bouquet shriveled at a crossing. The trees bow and weep, but everybody knows the rains revises nothing, the charred bones belong...
to no one. Beyond the verdant mountain, a caravan of mothers and fathers beg a cankered country for the locus of cruelty. Farther, a troop of camouflaged men burn fields of red poppies --- those lovely flowers of happiness and squalor.