

# Those Letters

Cathy Ruiz

I burned those letters  
that I'd kept locked in a heavy black chest  
that always took two to move. I'd hung onto those  
words  
for too long.  
Too long I'd treated those letters like they were  
precious weapons,  
carved my needs with their words; included their final  
ritual  
in my will.

Did they speak of love?  
Perhaps.  
But I treated them as though they held the only secret  
of my life  
in love.

Well, I finally let go of all that, I tossed those  
letters into a box,  
then, out the door, into a wheelbarrow  
and across the yard they went.  
Landed right on top of a big bonfire of brush and  
brambles.  
Clearing land you know.  
I had to.

I stood there and watched as those old words  
that once kept my heart cold—loss can be like  
that—turn brown,  
the pages curl  
and the lines of ink smear  
into char,  
until those letters became a fine, black tissue,  
bits of which whirled up and over the treetops  
and I, down below,  
my heart beat warm  
in my chest.

*Cathy Ruiz, of Canadian Métis Ancestry, was the 2004 recipient of the Native Writer's Circle of the America's First Book Award.*