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.