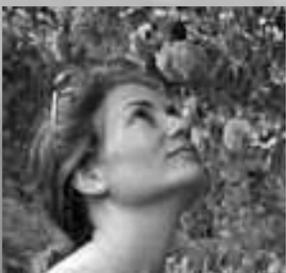


# The Roses

We bought two hundred forty pink and yellow roses at the flower market yesterday and I bought myself a new clippers with a burnt umber colored handle and a safety catch so no one will accidentally cut off a finger. My sister wields the clippers like a sushi chef and snips, one by one, each stem to an acceptable length to fit artistically into six-inch circular Mexican glass vases. It bothers me that we must clip their elegant long stems into stubby miniatures, but the trash can fills up with thorny branches and the leaves I plucked off one at a time. The cardboard box my son has turned into a racing car, says the roses came all the way from Cuenca, Ecuador and they are still fresh and fragrant after we left them to soak all night in buckets of water in my bathtub. They are still fresh after traveling so far north and I think they must be tired and disoriented because they speak a different language after all. Like shy foreign girls, they are a little slow to open up, but soon they tell me everything. They tell me about the warehouses and the clammy cargo holds and the men in white shirts with clip boards who counted them and caressed them up and down with breath smelling of garlic and chili. They tell of the border crossings and the dogs that sniffed and paced nervously and the flashlights that shined in their eyes as they were stripped and searched. They tell of the hilly farms where they grew up like finicky house cats, they were given only the best, the best soil, the best water, the best vitamins and they were groomed and cared for by hands that picked off every single insect, every fleck of dust. Now, in my kitchen, I arrange them tenderly into the bowls, one by one, like little girls behind the curtain backstage at a ballet recital, one by one, I push them out to dance.

## Gabrielle Mittelbach



Gabrielle Mittelbach is a native of Los Angeles. She recently finished editing her first manuscript entitled *Kisses From the Possessed*. Her poems have been published in *Rattle*, *Nimrod*, *Paterson Review* and she won first prize in the 2007 Poetry Super Highway poetry contest. She aspires to write poetry that makes people say "oh my god" and "oh my god" again.