Author in-depth bio:
ELIZABETH ACEVEDO is the youngest child and only daughter of Dominican immigrants. She holds a BA in performing arts from the George Washington University and an MFA in creative writing from the University of Maryland. With more than fourteen years of performance poetry experience, Acevedo is a National Poetry Slam Champion, Cave Canem Fellow, CantoMundo Fellow, and participant in the Callaloo Creative Writing Workshop. She has two collections of poetry, her chapbook Beastgirl & Other Origin Myths and the winner of the 2016 Berkshire Prize, Medusa Reads La Negra’s Palm. The Poet X is her debut novel. She lives with her fiancé in Washington, DC. Find her online at acevedopoetry.com

Author personal info (some unique piece of information):
I wrote THE POET X because as a young Afro-Dominican young woman, Spoken Word was a place that I found I could express myself and question all of the roles that had been impressed upon me by my culture, and neighborhood, and school which didn't feel comfortable. I've taught everything from 8th grade English to young women in detention centers to the award-winning DC Youth Slam Team, and time and again I was moved by the realizations that many of the young women in my classes and workshops found poetry as an outlet to be their full selves. The self they felt was too big, or loud, or black, or brown, or accented, or poor, or incarcerated; and so THE POET X if for them. A place where they can see themselves reflected back, and a reminder they exist and are worthy of every piece of literature.

I've attached a newspaper clip I found recently from one of my very first slams-- in 2004! I was fifteen at the time and the place I felt most powerful was the stage. So in the case of THE POET X, the personal connection is really personal. It's still fiction, but I'm not writing as an outsider. I'm excited for this publication because I'm so excited for how this story might resonate with others. I get emails and messages all the time from people who discover my poetry and feel this very real connection. They feel like their experience isn't as isolated as they imagined. And I hope THE POET X expands on my poetry videos and gives those folks a home.

As I was writing this I kept asking myself if my former students would see themselves in these pages, if they would be intrigued, if they would head-nod at my main character and so I hope many teens will feel this is an authentic voice who doesn't hold back. I don't shy away from what it means to be a girl these days: to be catcalled, to have menstrual cramps, to masturbate, to fall in like, to question the beliefs you were raised with. Although writing in verse forces an economy of language I hope I get a full young woman on the page, and I am completely unapologetic in how unapologetic my main character, Xiomara, is.
_Friday, August 24_

**Stoop-Sitting**

The summer is made for stoop-sitting
and since it’s the last week before school starts,
Harlem is opening its eyes to September.

I scope out this block I’ve always called home.

Watch the old church ladies, chancletas flapping against
the pavement, their mouths letting loose a train
of island Spanish as they spread he said, she said.

Peep Papote from down the block
as he opens the fire hydrant
so the little kids have a sprinkler to run through.

Listen to honking gypsy cabs with bachata blaring
from their open windows
compete with basketballs echoing from the Little Park.

Laugh at the viejos—my father not included—
finishing their dominoes tournament with hard slaps
and yells of “Capicu!”
Shake my head as even the drug dealers posted up near the building smile more in the summer, their hard scowls softening into glue-eyed stares in the direction of the girls in summer dresses and short shorts:

“Ayo, Xiomara, you need to start wearing dresses like that!”
“Shit, you’d be wifed up before going back to school.”
“Especially knowing you church girls are all freaks.”

But I ignore their taunts, enjoy this last bit of freedom, and wait for the long shadows to tell me when Mami is almost home from work,

when it’s time to sneak upstairs.
**Unhide-able**

I am unhide-able.

Taller than even my father, with what Mami has always said was “a little too much body for such a young girl.”
I am the baby fat that settled into D-cups and swinging hips so that the boys who called me a whale in middle school now ask me to send them pictures of myself in a thong.

The other girls call me conceited. Ho. Thot. Fast.
When your body takes up more room than your voice you are always the target of well-aimed rumors, which is why I let my knuckles talk for me.
Which is why I learned to shrug when my name was replaced by insults.

I’ve forced my skin just as thick as I am.
Mira, Muchacha

Is Mami’s favorite way to start a sentence
and I know I’ve already done something wrong
when she hits me with that beginning: “Look, girl. . . .”

This time it’s “Mira, muchacha, Marina from across the street
told me you were on the stoop again talking to los vendedores.”

Like usual, I bite my tongue and don’t correct her,
because I hadn’t been talking to the drug dealers;
they’d been talking to me. But she says she doesn’t
want any conversation between me and those boys,
or any boys at all, and she better not hear about me hanging out
like a wet shirt on a clothesline just waiting to be worn
or she would go ahead and be the one to wring my neck.

“Oíste?” she asks, but walks away before I can answer.

Sometimes I want to tell her, the only person in this house
who isn’t heard is me.
Names

I’m the only one in the family
without a biblical name.
Shit, Xiomara isn’t even Dominican.

I know, because I Googled it.
It means: One who is ready for war.

And truth be told, that description is about right
because I even tried to come into the world
in a fighting stance: feet first.

Had to be cut out of Mami
after she’d given birth
to my twin brother, Xavier, just fine.
And my name labors out of some people’s mouths
in that same awkward and painful way.

Until I have to slowly say:
See-oh-MAH-ruh.
I’ve learned not to flinch the first day of school
as teachers get stuck stupid trying to figure it out.

Mami says she thought it was a saint’s name.
Gave me this gift of battle and now curses
how well I live up to it.
My parents probably wanted a girl who would sit in the pews wearing pretty florals and a soft smile. They got combat boots and a mouth silent until it’s sharp as an island machete.
The First Words

Pero, tú no eres fácil

is a phrase I’ve heard my whole life.
When I come home with my knuckles scraped up:

Pero, tú no eres fácil.

When I don’t wash the dishes quickly enough, or when I forget to scrub the tub:

Pero, tú no eres fácil.

Sometimes it’s a good thing, when I do well on an exam or the rare time I get an award:

Pero, tú no eres fácil.

When my mother’s pregnancy was difficult, and it was all because of me,
because I was turned around and they thought that I would die
or worse, that I would kill her,
so they held a prayer circle at church
and even Father Sean showed up at the emergency room,

Father Sean, who held my mother’s hand
as she labored me into the world,

and Papi paced behind the doctor,
who said this was the most difficult birth she’d been a part of

but instead of dying I came out wailing,
waving my tiny fists,

and the first thing Papi said,
the first words I ever heard,

“Pero, tú no eres fácil.”
You sure ain’t an easy one.
Mami Works

Cleaning an office building in Queens. Rides two trains in the early morning so she can arrive at the office by eight. She works at sweeping, and mopping, emptying trash bins, and being invisible. Her hands never stop moving, she says. Her fingers rubbing the material of plastic gloves like the pages of her well-worn Bible.

Mami rides the train in the afternoon, another hour and a half to get to Harlem. She says she spends her time reading verses, getting ready for the evening Mass, and I know she ain’t lying, but if it were me I’d prop my head against the metal train walls, hold my purse tight in my lap, close my eyes against the rocking, and try my best to dream.
Tuesday, August 28

Confirmation Class

Mami has wanted me to take the sacrament of confirmation for three years now.

The first year, in eighth grade, the class got full before we could sign up, and even with all her heavenly pull Mami couldn’t get a spot for Twin and me. Father Sean told her it’d be fine if we waited.

Last year, Caridad, my best friend, extended her trip in D.R. right when we were supposed to begin the classes, so I asked if I could wait another year. Mami didn’t like it, but since she’s friends with Caridad’s mother Twin went ahead and did the class without me.

This year, Mami has filled out the forms, signed me up, and marched me to church before I can tell her that Jesus feels like a friend I’ve had my whole childhood.
who has suddenly become brand-new;  
who invites himself over too often, who texts me too much.

A friend I just don’t think I need anymore. 
(I know, I know . . . even writing that is blasphemous.)

But I don’t know how to tell Mami that this year,  
it’s not about feeling unready,  
it’s about knowing that this doubt has already been confirmed.
God

It’s not any one thing
    that makes me wonder
    about the capital G.O.D.

About a holy trinity
    that don’t include the mother.
    It’s all the things.

Just seems as I got older
    I began to really see
    the way that church

treats a girl like me differently.
    Sometimes it feels
    all I’m worth is under my skirt

and not between my ears.
    Sometimes I feel
    that turning the other cheek

could get someone like my brother killed.
    Sometimes I feel
    my life would be easier
if I didn’t feel like such a debt
to a God
that don’t really seem
to be out here checking for me.