One evening I got caught in a legendary Manhattan monsoon, and I bemoaned the drenching of my Kenneth Cole dress shirt, my black slimming slacks, my Italian leather shoes. The umbrella was useless, since the rains struck sideways as if from a fireman’s hose, so I tossed it into a puddle and watched the spokes glare with the streetlights.

Then, the memory flash: Abuela, worried that we’d get caught in the rain and get colds, draped thick, plastic sacks over my brother and me after piercing holes for our heads and arms. I was ten, my brother eight, and we arrived at school looking like stuffed sausages. The kids laughed but the teacher didn’t, sending a note home with me telling Abuela how dangerous this was, that we could have suffocated.

Abuela was indignant when I translated the note to her out loud.

And I remembered the time she bought a coconut cake for my birthday at the local market. The cashier had quipped under her breath, “Who would buy a cake like this?”

More memory: in junior high, Abuela asked my brother and me to wear the same clothing two days in a row. I didn’t question the motivation, and to please her even more I’d wear the same outfit three days in a row, sometimes four, until a cruel kid walked up to me and said, “Did you know that people call you the Photograph?”
I feel liberated suddenly, the indignities of times past washing over me, draining into the sewage pipes beneath the New York City sidewalks. I let it all go—the sweat, the tears, and even the piss—every shameful fluid safely camouflaged by the cleansing waters of a stormy night.