

# Five Years Later

*I was, and now I am.*  
So much goes into the saying of those few words.  
Sometimes this change is sweetness,  
A kiss, a caress. Sometimes,  
Nothing warns us. It cannot be thought by us.  
It is done to us. A gun,  
An earthquake, a flood — any of the muscular  
Horrors of this world.  
In those instances, we don't ask for it,  
We don't get to take a deep breath,  
It is simply the end of the chapter  
And Page One of the next. We are thrown  
Into the deep water and we are angry,  
*We are angry, we are angry.*  
We could not swim, but now we are swimming—  
We have to swim.  
It is not fair. It is never fair.  
We have no chance to be part of the decision  
That changes us.  
*We were, and then we are.* Regrettably,  
We are not alone. If it is one of us,  
It is all of us, so many of us.  
*We were, and now we are.*

Sweetness or cruelty, suddenness, shock,  
A rough touch that could be either:  
We are changed.  
If it has been a kiss, our lives are turned powerfully  
Toward lightness.  
But when it is not sweetness, not a kiss,  
We live the rest of our lives as someone else,  
But someone who is still us.  
If we had a gun, because we did have a gun,  
If things had gone differently, better,  
If the rehab had been more effective,  
Had God stepped in, had anyone heard:  
We would be living in the regular world.  
We could look at the rabbits along the highway  
And the blue, ragged mountains in the distance  
Like anyone.  
But, five years after something happens to us  
We are not the anyone.  
The jackrabbits and the Tucson Mountains—  
We love them, not easily but fiercely, fiercely  
In the new way we have had to find.  
We love them as who we are now.  
We love because that's what's left.

*The issues that surround the tragedy of Jan. 8, 2011 have been debated and disputed before, and will be debated disputed again. Instead, on this day, we offer a space for reflection. Arizona Poet Laureate Alberto Rios has partnered with The Republic to present a poem to mark today.*