

**JIMMY SANTIAGO
BACA**

Esai 1-23-04

The night you were born, Esai,
I planted a tree in my heart
to remind me of certain promises I made
to you—one was to always be there for you,
the other to love you,
the other to take care of myself so I could live
a long time with you. I look forward
to playing with you, fishing with you,
waking a thousand times and talking gently
in the morning
about your concerns.

The tree I planted has passed through almost four
seasons,
now in January, I pick pomegranates
red scintillating seeds mirroring sunlight.
I am fascinated by this fruit,
wonder how God could imagine such a
round, lumpy, scarlet seed fruit,
so hard to get out, to eat in big bites,
one must be patient to nibble the seeds,
pluck them, crunch them with teeth, savor
each delightful little hard-earned seed.

For days now you've wailed
over the pain in your teeth. When you open your

mouth, I see a white ridge beneath your gum line,
teeth, trying to come out. You will have to grow
teeth in other areas too, for instance:
when you don't want to study—teeth to bite down
and grip the books and see it through.
Teeth on your words to say what you mean.
Teeth on your fingers to hold the dream you want
and never let it go.
Teeth to defend your love, your heart, your life.
And the teething in these areas is more painful
than teething your gums,
when the heart grows teeth,
they become roots, and the roots hold you steady
in the fiercest storms.
The tree I planted has teeth, my son,
molars and buckteeth
to hold the entire universe
in its boughs and leaves,
offered to you as my fruit,
which now blooms with you in your highchair
in the kitchen,
where mother has cut up apple, orange, pear, and
banana
wedges you clench with your finger-teeth and munch.

ALBERTO YBARRA

Tio #2, 2011
Oil on linen, 20 x 16 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST