

## In Which My Mother Asks When the Hell I'm Getting Baptized

All our arguments take place at traffic  
lights, float the border between breath  
& steel. How intersections always form

the most dangerous geometries. Red  
neon throwing passenger's mouths  
ajar. Last Sunday, the lights decided

to flirt with physics, tore apart a pair  
of brakes: my mother's Lexus barrelled  
down Robinson Road & granted a wild boar

flight. It trotted out from nowhere, skin  
coated with smoke. Silver fur shredding fire  
onto pavement. We were on the way back

from church, sun still scraping onto the sky.  
The car radio crackled, bones waiting  
to strike a path out. That week another

batch of Sunday school graduates dipped  
in a bathtub, melted away their faces  
in white bouquets. & the congregation

snapped to attention, tears spilling  
through pockets. I grew up fisting prayers  
into tongue for my mother's pride,

gouged a newborn wound in my leg  
for every confession. My body turned open  
testimony. My body just enough. Perfect image

of a girl more girl than others, pores gripping  
onto survival. So I keep saying *maybe, maybe,*  
*another day.* Eyes ahead like the boar before

the crash. And I sever a family tree, axe  
the thread between lineage and future  
Thanksgivings. My jaw flickers, milk-

white teeth spewing alternate creation myths:  
in another life, I outrun the questions. In another

life, the boar strikes against our windshield again

& again, flinging at a god's embrace.

## Etymology of Paternity

At the hospital, a doctor's questions dig  
at my chest like scalpels. So I confess

my lineage. I confess the shortcomings  
of my blood. Yes—all the men

in my family hook their brains to the sky-  
light, shoot synapses around Mao-tais.

Their faces round as wasted moons. Cardinal  
rule: the world must be consumed. The men

dust flour on their hands and knead their wives'  
shoulders into dough, split their arms like orange

peels. Women made a spit-shined source  
of food. The men move like knives: always

absent, except at the dinner table. Mouths  
flippant, shaving denial from styrofoam

takeout boxes. As if they were raised to only leave  
and forget. In Chinese, amnesia and poetry

are homophones of each other. Not much of a difference:  
to lose grip over memory is to make each word more precious.

Language our economy. Leave more room  
in the mouth for flesh—pork wonton and desire.

So my fathers's forefathers became mired in delirium,  
started sinewing their vocabularies after fifty. Watches

turned *handclock*. Names inexplicable. At night,  
they'd hollow trust from their ears, force the biting

silence close. Just last year, my great uncle was  
chased down by the paranoia. Each day he kneels

by the bed in cheap prayer, eyes locked onto the safe  
like worship. After his diagnosis, I dissected my family

tree limb-by-limb, posted hazard signs  
for future daughters. Held memory's axis

against a razor blade. How a girl will do anything  
to cork these open mouths. To stop the men from

slipping, the way a moon wanes  
into its own crooked jaw.

**Bible Study Ghazal**

at dinner, my father's prayers demand a synonym for escape. door  
tugged around his finger. my tongue empties, mouth hinging like a door

loose with dread. obedient. i getaway car: machine slipping oil-slick letters. all  
past tense verbs exhausted as excess, knuckled against the door

knob. i want to say omission. or better yet, denial. my greatest ambition  
is to turn satellite, barrel infinitely towards incinerating. arrive at god's door-

step and leap straight into a bonfire, holes tunneled through every blessed  
hazard thrown my way. nothing more than to unseam my eyes, endure,

for once, ritual as spectator. unpiece hands clasped close since birth. haul  
questions towards the boundary of belief. so i steal a key and take the backdoor

out, grow a new spine with the etymology of exodus. sew  
a vigil for the root of my fleeing. at six, i stood at a door

barely ajar, learned the trick to testimony. cleaving miracles  
onto fear, i claimed encounters with beheaded voices at my bedroom door.

my parents showed teeth, bit bait. i started knocking on anything that would  
come unlatched: bones, eyes, orthodoxy. the body a houseful of incarnated doors.