

What Made Me

Sleep slips in with a mind of night. In the library,
a girl across me is asleep, doll dipped in blue light.
I wonder if I am the same in slumber, if I am girlish,
envied, if I am loved. I think of my mother's sleeping form,
the time she last saw me. A stranger child, a face
like her own. How I loved her then, in sleep.
The darkness outside, slow and yearning to touch,
presses against the window with its blind en-
compass. Night is the same eight thousand miles
away. It makes you a creator and you believe in it,
that which you know is false and already leaving you.
I thought once that my mother would surely know me,
in secret, for all her silences. Thick juice of night.
This, which we keep blue and heavy inside of us.
Do you know this feeling of being waist deep in a feeling,
reaching for something, and never quite reaching it?
The dark is always spilling truth as though it never meant
to have anything to spare. I think I am ten years old,
where the world is lucid and I am not holding on
to the only thing I know—my mother, rousing
from hard sleep, reaching for me. A lighthouse kind
of forgiveness. I know her for all the lack of things to say.

Night Fishing

Our hooks fall into tar water.
We sit on deck, salt crusting skin,
tugging the strings. Let it plunge,
then choke it up, the squid spurting
in salvation. Your eyes are dark
in the clammy light. I watch the squid
peg themselves to your hands,
pretend I like that you like to pull
and let go. They bleed that desperate ink.
White spots dart and they die. You
pluck them from your hooks,
sprawled as girls, intact and numb—
we are boneless and spilling. You do not
look at me. The pail is never full.
Soon you offer me yours, take
my empty bucket as reason for my tight lip,
lanterns for the glow in my eyes.
You don't know it, but it's the moonlight's
bruise on your face. It's me curved
around you, the rim of a glass bottle.
I want to be salt under your skin kissing
salt on the other side. I toss cuttlebones
into sea. Somewhere there is a sea
of ourselves swimming upward to a flare
of what we think we must know.
There is something about the glow
of the unknown, of heaven,
your mother's womb, a lost memory
coming back. When you touch me
you'll know all my spots are dying.
I hate how squid never fail to come
swimming up to light. I want you
tossed bare, going back from
whence you came, you stripped
of self, your light failing fast.

Dilutions

It is six in the morning and my grandfather is feeding sparrows on the balcony, grains of rice, bird shit like egg white. He shies from the sky—to look up would be to imagine his son, streak-ebbed to speck of white, a figure careening. All he has left is a handful of granddaughters. This, watching the birds, is the closest he will come to saying it. Grandmother and I watch the white fleck the shrubs. For him it seems the sky has waned—in a house of women, my grandfather cannot look at us. But grandmother says a son lost is the world cupped in both hands, the sky in your palms to trickle away—it wells again. Now she holds me to her sweat and I, girl in her grandmother's arms, am not cursed anymore. Grandfather retreats through the door, as if he has realized that birds do not pelt as bullets from above. Tomorrow he will stumble out again, hoping for a rainstorm of sparrows. The sky is brimming with the sweat of women. The world comes and goes and I must learn to hold the swell of it in my arms. Grandmother and I take the gloves, the alcohol, and wipe the balcony, the shit, the rice. I look at her and she is thinking of all the sons she has never had. This morning is bird shit, white, canvas awash with sweat, the smell, nothing she has ever seen, and grandfather turns away, unable to bear women, their sweat, their silence.