

## SEA OF CORTEZ

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*Excising Metastasis. White ash.*

White ash, she imagines, is pity, & lingers for years.

A builder yells news in Spanish  
from the neighboring beach house,  
its walls sad paper standing roofless, gaping  
for a sandstorm to whiteout the sky.

She imagines blind children obscured, their babble raising the sun  
like an orange-sash, goldenseals bursting  
beside the yellow surface of rivers.

Evening, her legs bronzed. The fish simmering  
*Grouper*, a name like the smacking of entrails.  
Swamped in heat she stares up a palm to white-pinned stars,  
dies on the most humid summer night,  
is cremated & scattered into winds        the desert natal, solemn,

she returns without memory of her mother's hands  
her father's rough eye, her *abuelita* on Sunday morning—  
*Nobody's there*, the mind speaks to its absence  
in the lines of tan, famished hills.

The sky is a gathering ash stirred & brushed to haze. The call yet to come.  
The streaking geese, their cries light foghorns.

## THE VARIANCES

I.

Distant sirens, flowering.

*as in the era of my father, ragtime bands, when you could drink gin 'till sunup*  
you say traffic patterns us  
the unquiet patterns of brake release    break release.

A beggar clutches coins inside her plastic bag  
& they tinkle like water                      on the sheet metal of an eave.  
We wait it out, rainladen,

the street awash  
in obsidian & neon    the engine running    no one at the wheel.  
*out to lunch, just like your mother*

you say some thought remains    & will become  
what we leave behind.  
Casually, you say it is alright, we are all of us like wet clothes on a line.

I want you to say: A Grace Hewn to Small Pieces Remains a Grace  
like a title  
because it is yours.

II.

A mother's hands palsy

I receive the call from hospice    a phone clatters across kitchen tile.

The white room tears neon slivers from our eyes.

These are images of night settling

in our bodies.    Her hand observes mine in its grasp,  
renouncing her body. My lips susurrations

the red barn immolated    taillights flash red apples

my mind breaks in its grasp

& I know

you are

& are not

III.

Flickering limpid on a window  
refusing the wind  
one concert poster for the steel pan band  
you identify  
in the foreign subjunctive:

the promise of glass  
over which your cut grace whimpers  
like a slighted child.

one rabid pit-bull clinches    a calf in the nightmare    late summer

          a field of Jasmine prospers    ash raining through air

## THE ETYMOLOGY OF SHARK

*is unknown*, she says this, touching her hair, because airport vodka is contentious. We sit at the bar, the kiss and clink of highball glasses. Her flight from Lisbon was delayed, and mine a streak over the Atlantic. *A near miss* she says, our fingers fumbling. When I compare marriage to finding water in a desert, she looks to her hands. She is a midwife starting over, waiting on baggage in unseen cargo holds to arrive on another land. If there were time we might leave together, get a room outside, among the rows of neon cheap hotels. We might apologize fantastically, projecting past lovers onto each other's faces. She may describe the tomb inside her, the men she loved too early. She is the shell of her own suffering. We speak lightly of news, weather.