

THE FACTORY

In a factory feverish with fault,
my teenaged mother licks her finger

punctured by a needle's stem –
blood along the rough

silk, along the adoring eye
of a swan she embroiders,

black as a rotting lime. What I
would do to sew myself to

this – pinned to her like a sad
prom rose, a floppy daughter

of devotion in frilled tux.
Decades later, a man bites my

finger and says *you're so*
fucking rotten and I think of this scene:

of my mother and the factory
women, the chattering teeth

of each machine, of constellations
made by needle pricks, puncture

by starry puncture. My mother
left the factory when she married

my father. I am his blood too,
his swell and well whiskey

lot. After the man leaves,
I lick my plum finger. I fix

my mascara, my lashes: blue
peacock feathers. I float through

streets full of temples bulldozed
to build condos, each porcelain tile

gleaming with gold, guttered
among dirt and clank. To be of

use. Or: cast-off, off with your
dress, the rest: headless. Dear

daughter, you ask what I
fight, what I feral against?

FIFTY

This year, my bones are growing faster than my children's. My femurs, flourishing. Wasn't I supposed to shrink, to curl into myself like a spider

washed down the drain, legs a prune? Instead, I am strengthening, steeling myself against all that surrounds me. I hold my family together

with twine, call them the Lioness's Cubs. In my ear, the pressure continues to build. Night shift after night shift, my vision all a blur. Can't seem to

undo these mirrors of self, repeating infinite versions. Can't keep breaking all these rules of gravity. Gravity refuses to fall to the floor as the clock lulls

backwards, its limbs too short, too rigid for my taste. Why can't gravity fall through the floor with me? Vertigo, the doctor says. I don't

look this up, but I say the word all the time like stuffing my mouth with so many carnivals. Night shift after night shift, I come home to vertigo, a tangled mess of

cords slivering with electricity. I almost trip, vertigoly. I tell my son: I don't understand what all this technology is good for. I tell him:

in this decade, I just want persimmons, thread, enough yarn to spin my daughter home. I want eggs. I want time and gloomy

give. I want to call every man a dove because that's what you are to me. I want to slow down and spin outward, a slow

dance in this veritable den.

FOUR

The air is like bubble gum
but I don't know that at all.

Can I chew anything except
these flies along a grain of rice

I hold up like a geode I want
to chew open? Baba carries

the wood over his shoulders
like he's a roof about to

crater in. He builds a fire
I can smell but can't taste.

Roasted peanuts and flour and
water and clay. My sandals are

loosening into smoke, plastic
wheezing into ever-pink

dust. I touch my oxen's ears, call
him *Weather*. He snorts, tells me

it will rain soon and everything
will wash away, flood by fever

flood. I clap my ears like a cymbal
in a doom parade of Red Guards.

What does an ox know anyway?
The fire heaves with Baba's

breath, a heavy burgundy.
Soon, the details flake

away. Fever: a sudden spate of clouds.
Flood: guards rounding the earth

as if it had corners. A rat pecks
at scraps we peck at and this

is not how I pictured revolution.
Baba weathered in rough army

arms, their sticks stunning
his cheeks, carrying him away

like a sack of potatoes I would
gladly devour by the wormy

gut-full. In my version, Baba isn't
imprisoned. In my version, I call

the Revolution *Earthquake. Monsoon
of Muck*. I strike the earth with maggot

heavy fists. With spit and howling hail.
I shake everything pink until they give

my Baba back, until the guards bow
like a giant weeping willow and grovel:

sorry little girl, I'm so sorry. In my
version, I touch my father's hair,

smooth it back to lacquer black.

PRAISE THE LONELY

The first night I spent alone

I threw my head back

and cackled like pork rinds

tossed in fresh pepper.

That night I refused to brush my teeth –

allowed the muck to become cavernous

in its carelessness. I slept

with my shirt unbuttoned,

opening like French doors

in custard light and barely visible

wind. Alone, I dined on an entrée

made entirely of shellfish;

I sucked everything clean.

Brined through and through,

I ran to myself like a cow running

to starry-pasture: tongue-

out and hoofs a-hooting:

Here I am! Here I am!