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I am Afraid

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DULCINEA Mirtha Aertker

I am Afraid

Allison Smith

I am afraid of bony fingers
And if they are cold, it's even worse.
I can feel them around my neck already.

A nervous hand, I'd chop off my arm.
Watch how still I am in the water, I barely make a wave.
If I leave the water running, I can't hear your voice,
So I haven't bathed for days.
I'd recognize your voice if you were behind me.

Turn around.

I love your voice
Imprinted in my head,
Each inflection like a filthy hand
On a white wall.

If you say you love me,
I'll drown.
If you say you love me,
I'll destroy
Everything.

I've seen rain and fire
Together.

In the rain
a woman in a flannel nightgown, blue and white flowers
Dripping into each other,
Watching her house
Burn.

This is when I need you most.

Blue haze, thick smoke, your unwavering hand cupped over my mouth.
I am not screaming.
I am not suffocating.
I cannot be turned to ash.

The Cantonese custom of exhumation:
After seven years, the bodies of the dead are exhumed
And the bones are scraped and cleaned and sent to the village of origin.

Where shall I send myself?
Who will claim my life?

The lines of my palm are deep.
They dig below the surface of my skin
Inscribe my bones
And crack
Like dried mud.

Buried in these cracks is the history of my life.
Break me in half and you will find yourself in the marrow
That spills to the floor.

Like water.
Like an ocean.
Superfluous.

A flood that will tear leaves and limb, and rot will change
my form.
You'll pull the marigolds that flourish in the meadows,
Each yellow flower will smell of my flesh.

I believe in desire.
I believe in memory.
I believe I can be whole again.

This This

Jessica Rogalski

This is how I fade,
Light bleeding into dark.
Staring at my reflection, seeing
Lines and edges, blurry
Ego tangled with regret.

This is how I shout,
Against all instincts that hold me back.
Fighting to keep my voice.
One voice, the only voice.