

The time to leave the room where I've been growing hair from my face

—after Forrest Gander's "Loiter";
for Joe Gyomber

The hair that shrubs under my nose and ivies under my jaw
and down my neck is long enough to grab,
scraggly yet too sparse to gather as wool.

It is patchy like my father's—
archipelagos and peninsulas of crabgrass follicles—
thicker at the chin than at the cheeks.

Gently, my son submerges his 6-month-old fingers
into the dark manes and grips suddenly and firm,
a sharp whisper to my nerve endings:

"Tell me when it hurts, and then, try to forget about it."

These vestigial whiskers are strong, dry and gnarled but never dead,
stubborn weeds that line his way; he mouths and soaks the shag—

Christ thirsty for the sponge on the hyssop—
as if doing so for long enough will eucharise their sour wine into mother's milk.

On their coarseness, he usually falls asleep within minutes,
but I hold him for minutes still: minutes that slip their microscopic bodies
between ours, regardless of how close we hold one another;
minutes that leave without saying goodbye;
and though I've nailed down plenty of them in pictures, they're minutes
whose empty husks remind me, months later, that they'll never return.

The hair I've been growing on my face is all he knows,
unaware that the comb over I wear from ear to ear
is not what a beard is supposed to be,
and I am not a man, or a parent who bathes and dresses him for bed
as Mary Magdalene prepared her Lord's body for resurrection:

I am a pangea, a person whose gaps he'll have to learn to ignore,
a mass of everything he knows outside the womb,
anamnesis of the time we were once one substance—
he, the vinegar and I, the mother.

Now, as he dreams in my arms, we are one again:
a land in this world whose fragments are stable enough
to keep him still while he grows—
all for the moment when he comes alive on his own.

A Thief and a Liar, Said the Dragonfly

We weren't a dragonfly standing motionless
midair, two bodies floating as one flesh, seemingly, unaided.

Nor the rumblings of its wings flapping— our struggle
to defy the gravity of something that *was* there
but wasn't there before—
echoed in the murmurs of those noticing
their incredible speed—
translucent, but not invisible.

The only serum to avoid total infestation
was to find an exodus from the bondage,
the exoskeleton we could no longer bandage.

Its pairs of wings flew us into a threesome
with a divorce lawyer who took her time to dissect
the insect of our marriage into its individual parts:
if she plucked two of its wings, would it still be able to fly?
If she snapped its abdomen, would it recognize up from down,
left from right, what was wrong from what was wrung?
If she tweezed out its heart from its torso,
would it continue to feel like a fly?
And, when it looked at its own reflection,
as it hovered over murky waters again,
would it need to be reassured that what was left of it was still right?

As you flipped through the divorce papers,
I could still smell the sebum of your hair
calling to me from nights before when I used to burrow
my nose in your hindhead— the tickle of a thousand antennae
I learned to grow accustomed to.
Its pungent yet fresh signature was mingled with
the laws we promised to follow
before a judge under the courthouse's aileron.

There was no space between the forms' sections
to fit any of our happy moments,
or my infidelity paranoia
or your lucid dreams about how we could, someday,

build a home and a life in El Salvador
because then our relationship would've been more than
an insignificant aphid, a pestilence— Levitical locust—
we needed to fumigate with black and blue.

There was no dragon or fire left in the fly,
no fistful of penitence or perseverance to turn us
into the butterfly you always fantasized we should've been;
the perfect marriage we could've been,
a creature we'd lived and labored and longed for,
parasites we hosted with love
only so they could vacate it
when they were ready for new lives.

If only we'd been lucky to possess,
just for a moment before we signed our dissolution,
the dragonfly's helicopter window eyes
to see things simply for what they were
not the compound of massacred bugs smeared
over the years and windshield wiper
the delusion, disillusion, and declension
to reveal the one thing we knew was more certain
than the mistrust guiding our marriage: our defeat.

No, we weren't the dragonfly,
we were the air surrounding its gemlike iridescence—
emptiness personified—
the unseen forces that it needed four wings
to bat away violently in order to fly.

Señora Añoranza

—*for Soledad Ramírez Marrón*

Lard, flour, water, air
are all you need to make life better,
stretched out and blossomed into something beautiful:
a promise of more, a tortilla.

Soft ivory flesh that shimmies and shivers
between the slivers of the hands;
its goosebumps give rise to freckles and moles
that sprout on their asymmetrical circumferences as randomly
as ink splotches and rorschach blots.
The larger dots are like brown eyes that stare long
and dark as those of Mamá Chole, the elder,
which slowly dimmed to a gentle gray—
more cerulean than cyan.

The tortilla recipe that Grandma hid in her hand wrinkles
was misplaced in my mother Cholita's fingernails—
long, lacquered, and layered in Egyptian blue, gloss and glitter.
I continue to search for it in the ocean of my oldest memories
and dig deep into the sandy beds of Tijuana dirt,
yet time sieves through the gaps in my grasp as raindrops
down its thin, glass throat as carelessly as I did taco after taco,
until its contoured body is flipped onto its other side like a tortilla rising,
soaring high beyond the hands that made it
like Noah's dove that found land, and on its beak,
carried the weight of peace amidst a deluge of misery.

All that Mamá Chole cared about was being enough for her own—
child or grandchild, young or old, family or friend, neighbor or traveler—
and when she made tortillas—
every day, a new Lord's bread, a lembas that never spoiled—
we were all hers: the people that were always hungry,
those that needed to be fed with the bounty of love
that took what little she had and pieced it together
into an arc where there would always be enough room for all.