

Surgeon General's Warning

Commercials corrupting
kiddies, cancelling
kinder-care. Cancer,
killing. Cultivate caution.

Carcinogen candy
cremates conscious corpses.

Sopas de Caldinho (Kale Soup)

The only way I can make kale soup is with words,
toss letters in a pot with some meat and stir,
hoping something decent comes out. I try
to remember the recipe, the words, but sometimes I lose them.

I remember *Vovó* tossing live crabs in the boil.
Into the pot they'd go, mixed together in a stew of lost days.
After scattering and writhing, like memories trying to remember,
we'd break their legs to toast another moment soon to be a forgotten thought.

Vovó wasn't like the other *Avós* - her Portuguese was on the plate,
in her offering a *bolacha* when I was fresh and a *bolacha* when I was good.
It was in her dark hair and tan skin, inherited from Azorean ancestors,
tending to island farms, gathering cabbage and onions, butchering the pigs for *chouriço*,

mixing them into kale soup – a recipe made from memories,
never written down, just told like old stories,
their travels overseen by half shell Marys,
carried here by planes and boats, shipping

family and feasts, religion and tradition, memories
fresh and forgotten. I cannot remember
sometimes, so I keep stirring the soup,
mixing words - hoping something decent comes out.

The Resilience of Earthworms

The dog never liked earthworms.

He wasn't a vicious dog.

He never bit, barked too loud,
or ran out of sight.

But in the spring,

after the rain had pushed
the worms through the dirt, he'd pull
them up, bearing his teeth and whip
them against the concrete
wall that surrounded the yard.

After the violent *thwack*, the worm
would delicately, silently break
in two. I'd watch as the two halves
lay still, then – come alive. They writhed
and wriggled away and back into the ground

and the dog
would lift his leg to the wall.

Displays of Nature II

We sit on the handmade wooden playset.
I don't remember why we chose that place.

The nameless woman reads us a story
about water bugs and dragonflies.

What do you think the story is about?
Julia can't form full sentences yet. I answer,

Water bugs turning into dragonflies?
A dragonfly flutters by our heads.

Yes, but what do they represent?
I shrug. *Death*, the woman says,

as if I should know this. She explains
the allegory of the story, but

I block her out, like everything else
and warm myself in the noonday sun.

Canaries in the Basement

Sometimes I'd sneak
downstairs and peer
through the crack
of the closet
to watch the birds
try to fly. To hear
them sing. My sister
got one for her
birthday. And another.

I never did.