

the unsung

bodies were never meant to shake.
to break apart, limb by limb.

but this is what this country does; rips bodies, until they will never be made whole again
a leg thrown into the green bush of appalachia,
right arm wrapped around frail branches of the redwood forest,
three toes bent and fractured at the bottom of a trash can in o'hare airport.
lips stolen by the bosses that tell you to shut up and keep working,

to only speak english around here.

lungs buried deep beneath the ground, so you can't cry anymore. so you can't breathe.
who hears you? nothing but air, and fog, and the sky—maybe god.
he is your friend, you say. perhaps your only.

temesgen gaytai, temesgen gaytai.

you live and die, live and die on the same earth that birthed you,
that birthed me. yet here, these fields of unbelonging
only grant imaginings of hope wrapped tightly around a corpse,

disassembled and bloody.

*temesgen gaytai means 'praise be to god' in tigrinya,
my mother tongue, the language of my mother

spiders in the home

you move quietly, in stillness.

through the fears of my mother, of my aunt asking if we've eaten enough,
of my grandmother's shaky hands and tense words, you move.

the corner of my walls are filled with you, like spider webs,
empty and forgotten, so i let you be.

there's no reason to bother you

you are not death, but you will kill me—well you wish to.

and perhaps, i'll let you stifle life out of me in ways i can't explain.

for now you linger in my gut.

we live together like partners in crime, or desperately in love.

a shadow given by the grace of the sun.

in the bathroom mirror, i place my hands over the last place we talked

palms stretched out, grazing over the dirty glass,

i see my grandmother, and her daughters, and their daughters. i see me.

our lineage, black and heavy.

gums and grounds both bleed red

how do you learn fear?

by counting the seconds of the night, waiting for them to
come into our homes, to step on shattered glass.
so that no matter how hard my mother tries
to bleach the stone and wood, the floors still float in crimson tides.

how do you learn fear?

by running to the shores, laying against the current, mouth closed
as your body is taken & sent across the ocean.
sent to the land where [] died.
to settle in stillness & into the night.

how do you learn fear?

by wiping sticky tar on your goodwill jeans
and your cousin's hand-me-down chicago bears t-shirt
as you sit in asylum services, feet barely touching the ground.
fingertips black and blue.

how do you learn fear?

by forgetting the way your tongue hits the back of your gums
as you say 'how are you' in your people's language.
of forgetting your father, and his father, *abouy*, of your name.
of where you came from.

together, you and i (sonnet)

coasts unto coasts unto coasts
he stretches past continents,
greeting huddled masses on brown tin boats.
entangled together by journeys of chance and chains.
those passages and odysseys are only song;
lyrics tethered to memory and archives of our kind,
until it is *your* turn at first verse, until it is *mine*, age four.
green like the land that forced us into exile
of hegira & religious pilgrimage to the West, of scattered bodies.
there, Kin whisper our names and histories to the abyss, a study of ontology.

where do we go? if not the ocean and seas,
if not to the old ports and aging tides that meet us with ease.