Pirouette
Heather Tanner

Shaking like dew on a dog’s fur at dawn, your fingers reach up in tentative touch from the hospital bed. Out of my history I hold only broken English for you, because I have forgotten every important word needed for times like this. Without answers I sit knitting you scarves from the headstones of our memory, friends and forgotten partners, counting the beats per minute until dawn—Where Are You From you said.

Follow this trail of words I know. They are breadcrumbs you reach for in the dark on the way home from your empty hallway days. Heel to toe in the uncertain dance I can’t always follow, I still need you to believe in tomorrow for me. These unforgiving sounds of heart monitors and clean shoes on spotless tile floor pushing through years of graveyard shifts, count the hours Six to Two One to Nine. We can shift, swing graveyard and give daylight to day. Who Sent You Here you said.

Licking my lips, static in the room threatens to snap with the weight of testing, of waiting, of anticipating arrhythmias and flutters. Promise me one more morning under these loosely woven blankets pitched like a tent Promise me wetness Promise me rain and

What Are You Saying you said.

Your body cupping mine in the heat that follows shadows, I have been alone here before and now you have come home.

I remember my life as a womb lined with cement, the city pumping dirty needles and wet leaves down gutters and veins. I come from dirt bikes and wet Virginia pines. I come from the memories of that policeman who shot a ten-year-old boy in Queens and that woman stripped to bare bones by her rapist and that CEO, you remember the one, who dumped toxic waste in the Mississippi for so long people started getting cancer from it. This is what I remember of my life before coming here. Counting tragedies higher than my fingers and toes. Counting on a few more hours with you.

Where Are You From you said, with conviction this time.

I can’t remember much about my life before here. I cradle the pain in
my throat with a swollen tongue, refilling and nursing it to stay awake.

Something wrongful happened to my country before I died. Bodies laid out sweating maybe sleeping in the streets with their eyes still open, and there was never enough water or rice or flour or doctors. Blood and feather and fur filling the storm drains on my street where we floated paper boats after a thunder storm when the earth worms surfaced. I try to remember my mother’s face, or my sisters. I think I had two, because when I squint my eyes and hold my breath I smell of lavender and burnt sugar, one on the left and the other my right.

Sitting at your feet, at the foot of your bed tucking the sky in, pinning your bangs back.

Knitting the air into stone blankets for you, I tell you I am from the dirt where I buried you and climbed into your bed for the last time to count hours until sunrise.

Six

to

Two

One

to

Nine

In the shifts from graveyard to morning to swing, sing my lullaby and swing back in my arms to see what I’ve found on the gray sandy shore. Row and sing, graveyard to swing.