

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Ashley Wu: Three Poems

Ashley Wu · Saturday, June 13th, 2020

### which hot suicidal female poet would you bang?

amen starts with  
the mouth open and  
ends with it closed as if  
swallowing all that dead air  
could bring you closer to god  
is this not a form of worship  
someone's dirt-caked nails  
digging into my scalp  
their mouth saying  
*can I touch you*  
like I am not a woman  
but a briar  
a thing to be hacked through  
my eighteenth birthday  
was a death march  
the path to womanhood  
lined with narcissists  
but I did not know this at sixteen  
for you were the first one  
if a boy becomes a man  
pressed between blood-slicked thighs  
then I become a poet  
baptized in hands  
in neon bar lights  
the sweat sheen of beer  
in southern highways  
flanked with wildflowers  
in prayer  
in knees clasped together  
on hardwood floors  
you ask me again  
*can I touch you*  
your tongue against

my neck before  
I can say yes

\*

## eczema

tell me why  
beauty is blemishless  
when there are figs of grass  
in the craters under my eye

my skin  
shifting tectonic plates  
erupting with  
dysmorphic red flowers

my mother washes  
away these blooms  
with shame concealed  
in her pupil

as if my red skin  
were small hands  
tethered to the bottom  
of her skirt

pulling  
inch by inch  
being a woman is hard enough  
being ugly is the

proverbial nail it is  
the seal on an envelope  
the last word still  
hanging in the air

as if the one  
who uttered it  
wishes they could  
swallow it back down.

my mother was once poor  
she was bruised  
her stomach hollow  
with nothing but need

but she was never  
ugly  
she swallowed her want

into paper balls

she says it's the huo qi  
so much fire  
in the pit of my stomach  
that it blooms out my lips

my yearning  
makes a home on my body  
where it should be clean  
uninhabitable

I turn to her  
with my ugly mottled face  
and ask her  
to look me in the eye.

\*

## old rituals

i dreamt you translucent  
like the jelly

that sticks to the roof of my mouth  
in hot georgia summers

i seek solace in touch

i seek solace in anything

with a pulse and two limbs  
that can form a vise around my neck

do you remember  
bridging the gap between language and abstraction

with nothing but a switchblade  
and the mute tips of our fingers

do you remember  
the centuries of stories

i pressed with my mouth  
in the hollow divot of your spine

the secret i folded  
and stuck between your ribs

a cry for god  
in an apartment swathed in blue light

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