

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Jennifer Givhan: Three Poems

Jennifer Givhan · Wednesday, January 3rd, 2018

### The Rhinoceros Calf

that failed to make a strong bond with its mother  
& was shipped from a Florida zoo to New Mexico's

(they'd struck a deal with the dairy farm for that baby  
would drink thousands of gallons of cow's milk)

that calf in the corner who doesn't know I'm watching her  
or thinking anything at all & will remember her for years

will think of her often with her sugared substitute her dry  
high desert air & wonder why on the coast

in humidity & hurricane weather in an enclosure  
like ours

& my children sitting beside

me on the bench where I watch tears down my face my  
children asking why are you crying mama & the truth

is I don't know did that mother with her body  
say nothing say no did that mother really just let go

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### The Girl (Whose Mother Filled Her Belly with Meth & Let Terrible People Mutilate Her Body Before Killing Her) Runs Away

*for Victoria*

1

She does not immediately want you to read her story on the front page of the newspaper at the Walgreens on Universe & Paradise where you're refilling your living girl's prescription & buying your girl safe a bottle of crystal blue electrolytes She wants you to keep your



fuzzed skin of my newly-shaped breasts  
 (girls in alleyways if you survived dumpster-  
 diving you survived anything)

2

A mother lost her children  
 to her ex-husband her children with bruises  
 on their thighs in the apricot-soft  
 within their elbows photographs the judge ruled  
 circumstantial or unprovable the wife could not prove  
 I'm wrecked for a system failing to protect what we love

When I say wrecked I mean the razorblade  
 I stole when I was fifteen from the hardware store

pressed to my wrists like cat claws  
 I told my mom were the neighbor's cat's

Mom she's wild she's untamable that fat tabby  
 (I don't mean wrecked for the women but  
 unmothered things)

3

My ex's nana had a stroke  
 & my ex-nuera Sally told me she asks for me time to time

my ex-railyard familia barbacoa & soaking beans  
 like I'm never drunk in the grass anymore wailing

like that alley tabby I've never stopped  
 needing—she lies in bed

between my husband & me stomach pressed  
 to sheets & waiting hollowed calavera

en día de los muertos marigolds  
 laid on the altar of her belly button

though now she could be my ex's daughter  
 at her Quinceañera in white like a mother in the news

who measured her daughter's growth through  
 years pressed in a wedding dress from the time

she was a baby God she was too young

4

& fifteen was a good year for me—  
 In the desert time of Valley ache      in that wide bowl

of my hips      bone dry asparagus fields crackling  
 heatwave where I'm still burying placenta      fat as hearts

& beating back border roots with my fists  
 (I told the girl who said this poem is her one

chance      the doors will shut      love      in your face      love—  
 knock them down      climb the fucking fire

escape) year I first learned to light myself  
 on fire      call the firetruck of my own

body      that holiest of waters

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