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PAPER CUTS

While crossing the river of shorn paper,
I forget my name. My body,
a please leave. I want a patron saint

that will hush the dog growling
at trimmed hedges it sees in the night.
I want the world to be without language,

but write my thoughts down just in case.
Send help, the dog's growling
won't let me sleep. I haven't slept in days.

I am looking for a patron saint, but none
will let me pray for guidance. There is a buzz
in my right ear that never goes away, no matter

how hard I hit the side of my head
for loose change. Most mornings
I wonder who I can pray to that will make sure I never

have to survive waking again. Most nights
I forget to pray the rosary, though I sleep with it
by the bed. I've never owned a TV because

I'll replay this conversation in my head.
My dead lovers are hungry in the kitchen,
so I fix them food they cannot eat. I make toast

of vellum paper, fry an egg made of crepe.
I only want a patron saint to protect me.
I only want someone else to bleed.

THE TRICK IS TO PRETEND

the ladder keeps going. The black dust

that peels the paint off your car

is on each rung. Don't touch

your face. I imagine police

with spotlights, a system to hunt

my geolocation, the whir

of a drone. I had dark lines

across my feet, deep scars—

where did they go? The game

is who can avoid interrogation,

who can split themselves

into a hundred coded squares,

lines in alternating directions going...

I want to enter this country

like the rich with the swipe

of a card, a scan of the face.

But they required a stomach

strong enough for chemical labor.
I climb knowing the only way down
is by falling. Police paved
a concrete square to catch me,
men wait with high powered hoses
to spray what's left of my body down.

AGE IS MAKING ME LESS STRUCTURE, MORE DISRUPTION

From my arms hangs a snag
of ribbon, Saint Sebastian's
bleeding chest, the sun as coconut

mask. All I ever wanted was a nail
in my palm, a hammer to the back
to hold some personal gallery.

Hand me that wreath and I'll drop it,
strike it to my head and I'll display it
as a crown. Look at me—domestic,

utile, built for use. My legs keep
getting thicker, my belly round.
My mother taught me to cook anything

I could find in my pantry for dinner
on nights I work late. She says:
He'll eat it because there's nothing else

to eat. I tell her: *He'll eat it*
and complain. Perhaps I lack
imagination, perhaps I've spent

too many years applying
for documents from the state.
I'd pierce a hole in any part of my body

so that you'd see me as beautiful,
but can't imagine being invited over
for dinner and not washing

each guest's plate. I wasn't built
to hold things down, but to make
a pleasing display. Most days I wish

I had some ancient woman's purpose:
weaver, healer, mother to many
sons. Instead, my mother raised

a woman who is aging
useless. My face, a stripped
ruin. My neck, a cracked façade.

SOME MANIFESTO

The U.S. nation-state is a state that owns many nations.
The U.S. nation-state is a state of many minds.
The U.S. nation-state is a security camera & a Bioten scan.
The U.S. nation-state has a box of fake social security cards.
The U.S. nation-state puts Lithium in the tap water.
The U.S. nation-state tells me I am so dumb.
The U.S. nation-state tells me he only wants me for papers.
The U.S. nation-state told me I could love him, but sent border patrol every day to our
block.
The U.S. nation-state told me to want the ring, the gown, the roses.
The U.S. nation-state told me to want the house, the joint healthcare plan, the
retirement savings.
The U.S. nation-state told me I could finally get plata on my bad teeth.
The U.S. nation-state told me to get married at 23, so I did.
The U.S. nation-state told me to get married at 23, and I'm still paying off Homeland
Security.
The U.S. nation-state told me to get married so that they could put the man I love on a
record.
The U.S. nation-state told me to please open the trunk.
The U.S. nation-state told me to please step out of the vehicle.
The U.S. nation-state told me to never to look a drug sniffing dog in the eye.
The U.S. nation-state said my poems should be like the immigration interview.
The U.S. nation-state said I'd do fine having survived so many immigration interviews
already.
The U.S. nation-state asks to take your pretty picture.
The U.S. nation-state asks you to show your ears so they can see them in the pretty
picture.
The U.S. nation-state socks you in the jaw for the pretty picture, the red stain.

PARTS OF YOUR WHOLE

A gust of wind is made with dirt and a can
of aerosol adhesive. The night sky, a gathering
of gold stickers. I splice a photo of you

down the middle. A desert in your chest,
Mount Taylor in your hair—I crave
its white peak on a spoon. I glue myself

next to you. In a bikini stoking a fire,
I am all body. Behind us a very large array
of trailers changing their location,

coordinates to the skies movement.
My skin ripples, transparent to this magazine
landscape. I pinch my love-handles,

I need to trim this much off
with a pair of scissors.
Our haircuts, perfect clumps, our eyes,

two dabs of hot glue, our hearts, nail clippings—
a dash of red. I score your Missing Flyer
to create my last illusion:

how are you be a ut fit ful?

AFTER MAKING RED CHILE

I keep a few loose threads from each membrane
and loop them through a needle to sew an X
on the sleeve of your favorite black sweater.

Later, we make love and you complain
my fingers burn your body. I rub my eyes
with one hand and reach for your inner ear

to burn us both from the inside. I imagine
your lungs after a wildfire become burning
ash. My mother said no one would ever

love me because I am smoke that suffocates
and one day she'd break my soul.
She'd say this hitting my face until

it glowed and people would ask me
what blush I was wearing.
In bed I break limes with my teeth

and rub them on your ears to soothe the pain
I've caused you. I rub limes
on my eyes—they dilate, I sing.

PLEDGE ALLEGIANCE

I tap-tap-tap the window, while my mother smiles and mouthes,
Tranquila. I tap-tap the glass, my mother a fish I'm trying to summon.

I tap until a border agent says: *Stop*. Until a border agent
shows me the gun on her belt. My childhood was caught

on video border agents deleted every three months.
I thought myself a movie star blowing kisses at the children

selling chiclets on the bridge. My cruelty from the backseat window
caught on video—proof I am an American. The drug sniffing

dogs snap their teeth at my mother detained for her thick accent,
a warp in her green card. My mother who mouthes, *Tranquila*.

My mother's fingers dark towers on a screen for the Bioten scan.
Isn't it fun? says the border agent. The state takes a picture

of my mother's left ear. *Isn't it fun?* I tap-tap-tap the glass
and imagine it shatters into shiny marbles. A marble like the one

I have in my pocket, the one I squeeze so hard I hope to reach
its blue swirls. Blue swirls I wish were water I could bring to my mother

in a glass to be near her. Friends, Americans, countrymen lend me your ears!
But only the border agent replies, *Do you know the pledge of allegiance?*

She points to a flag pinned on a wall. I do, so I stand and pledge to the country
that says it loves me so much, it loves me so much it wants to take

my mother far away from me. Far away, to the place they keep
all the other mothers to sleep on rubber mats and drink from toilets.

Don't worry, says the border agent, *we will take good care* of your mommy. My mother
mouths, *Tranquila*. Her teeth, two rows of gold I could pawn

for something shiny, something shiny like the border agent's gun.
Friends, Americans, countrymen lend me your ears, so I can hear

my mother through bulletproof glass, so I can hear her over the roar
of American cars crossing this dead river by the wave of an agent's pale hand.