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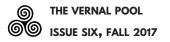
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ELLE LAMMOUCHI THREE POEMS



Next of Kin

It's the end of September and cold. The smell of iron clings to the breeze of central heat. You had forgotten that his blood pooled into the floor vent, spread between the tile grout until the EMTs arrived. It's strange the way iron doesn't smell like death, but bitterness, the kind you felt when the surgeon's marbled eyes convinced you he was gone. Twelve hours later you scrub the lumps of his brain matter that cling to the porcelain sink in the bathroom of your shared home. You are his brother, bound by blood shed in the alleyways between broken homes. His family, the ones you haven't seen in years, wait in the hall. Knock softly, ask you if you're done. You scrub harder until the porcelain peeks through.

Snow Crabs are Benevolent Beings

The fish, that are not snakes, slither through the sand. Sidewinders, winding their way through the desert. Every third solstice they shed their skin-sheathes: always after midnight, but before the sea-gulls swell to cry. They do not see the skin-sheathes they leave summersault like tumble weeds into the horizon for they do not have eyes. They are dark beings whose bodies bulge with cactus leaves they have gorged. The female-fish (who are not snakes) find these bulges attractive. In the month of August, they can smell the secretions of the bulges for up to two miles. The spikes smell like milk, although the fish are both lactoseintolerant and, also, not mammals. In the dead heat, female-fish will flop for miles to find a decent spike to mate with. Eggs plop out of bored holes into the sand. Within 37 hours their eggs tumble through the sanded grooves into a nest of air-brushed fish-flakes at the bottom of a dune. Their mothers slip away in the daylight. By the process of divine intervention some will be swallowed by snow crab missionaries. They will sing wind-whispers and wait for the newborn fish to chew their way out from their stomachs. They swim off, carving a mandala in the sand around the

snow crab's burnt red wound of a womb. The fish do not look back. The fish do not have eyes. The fish are (thankless) creatures.

The Turbulence of Life(Lines)

The sharp suction of the oxygen mask on your face bites. Your teeth dig into your bottom lip, grinding through the seconds until you can breathe again. You wait for the drugs to kick in.

The IV drips.

You're floating. Away, away, away, out of yourself. Out of your fattened body with the bloated ankles and swollen wrists, cut by red tags.

A contraction jolts you into the reality of bright lights and the cold metal of bedside bars, warming under your palms.

It passes.

You're swooning (again) with the

drip, drip (rhythm of the drugs) ... You think you see the surgeon, dressed all in white.

Your resolve:

starts to crumble

You're just about to blink the surgeon away when you feel the needle puncture the skin of your spine. He's cleaning up his supplies, humming, when you feel the tingling –

Sensation between your legs.

You	He is in
gasp	your arms. Hideous
your way through	and screeching,
his crowning,	you press his tiny,
but your shallow	clenched body
breaths cannot	between
push him	your breasts,
from within	covered in
your body.	dark blood,
You take a	because
deeper	the nurse
breath,	wasn't there
push hard,	to catch him and
three times, and –	

You had to reach down between your thighs and slip your trembling fingers into the tiny pockets of his armpits. You had to lift him into the bright artificial lights so, he wouldn't tumble out of you and be caught by the turbulence of the world.