

Reckoning

This is the year the asters never left.
All winter they held on, bulls-eye suns
spoked by lavender sparks—something in the air,
something changed, that has icebergs drifting
the seas like ghost ships. I look up to see
the first snow of my son's life falling—
limning each blade of grass, each corner
& crease outside, the way grease used to line
each whorl & wrinkle on my daddy's fingers
& palms, after a shift at the plant.
And this, this is the year his daddy gave up
his ghost. We were both a long ways away—
how many rivers, how many borders
or days, neither of us knows or wants to guess.
Neither of us have the language for this.
I like to think my Pake met his bride at the end
of a long dark aisle, a little light
in her eyes to guide his path. Then stepped through
to another side. I hope the wounds still
somehow sing in that world, as they give way
in this one to green shoots, to bud & bloom.
I know this is the year that children pan water
with potato sacks for cobalt, so our phones
might live. I know this is the year boats disappear
into the Mediterranean. The western black rhino
walked its last. This is the year of the never-ending
church service: as long as it lasted, the migrants
sheltered there would not be arrested.
This the year my son discovered his tongue—
sticks it out at me every chance he gets,
tongue the size of starfish fingers, the ones they drop
to the ocean floor, before collapsing
in on themselves, like stars. I know this is every year.
Hour between morning & night, asters
otherworldly, noctilucent in streetlight—
how did they get here? What feathers were buried
here, what bones, to give way to such as this?
Planted with the ashes of organ grinders, maybe.
With the ashes of dogs & monkeys returned
from space. Planted by a doge who tried to sail a cello
down a canal. Someone who gave up a crown.
A drunken opera singer. An angel who buried the last
of its memories of God. Petals like these falling
flakes, like the confetti that rained down
from the terraces of the Guggenheim, a blizzard

of prescription-size slips, to protest the money
behind the museum, money made from the 200
dead a day, 200 overdoses. Almost like a blessing
upon the air. I would beg it from anyone,
from this winter, though I only have the hem
of its cloak, this snow on my palm. I would ask it
for my son, daughter. For refugee boats sailing
this night, for those crossing a border.
It might sound like a vowel I've never heard,
heaven-sent, almost like an answer. A reckoning.
A word returned from the dark. Might sound
like *hallelujah*. Might be too soft to hear.