

Chaney Holland

My daughter on the Cyprian island

The almond trees that were salmon in the spring moonlight are bared in July. Farther down the road, the dust shimmers along the banks of the dry canal. Fourteen trees, one for each year I have spent here. In other seasons, the sounds of boys splashing in the dusk. Every year, one or two never returned.

I miss my children. Years ago, my daughter climbed those branches into the sky, from the public swimming pool into the blistering heat and sick every year from the ragweed that tormented her. She was glad to leave us.

Now I dream of her childhood, finger-paintings of blue corn and suns, a morning when I spooned a miniature silver cow from my cereal bowl. Am I so old that I cannot recover her willful and innocent face?

I am not ready yet. My child like a Teraoka wood-block print, one world draped over another and through the folds, secrets and temptation. You who are so sure, daughter, of where you lead, who are these women who claim you?

At night we said grace together over melon and olives,
and laughing she walked backwards with me through the
garden of scattered almonds.

I am a man of faith but I know my sight was dim. The
child who returned in the evening along the dusty path
was not mine but a long-drowned boy.

I cannot welcome these epiphanies. Though her mother
loved her so fiercely, it was I who wept and pleaded
with the thief who robbed me of my first miracle.