

Kristina McHaddad

Language

(for Suzanne)

We read to one another
until our voices ground down to gravel
in your room
gray with the smoke of cigarettes
you smoked back to back
in one continuous cloud,
the dim light settling like dust
on the silk and black lace
hanging on your walls,
slips of cloth falling limp without a body.
Like an invitation through a closed door,
your words pulled the color from my skin
and had me searching for an open window,
black night air
and cold water.
I thought I saw the wallcoverings
slip down over our bare shoulders--
the cool silk draped across our breasts
and the soft touch of old lace at the backs of our knees--
the pages of your manuscript scattered across the floor
igniting our feet
as we twirled, two girls
circling your room,
white pages rising
and catching in our loosed hair.

The Reason It Is Like This

I hold every minute
in my hands mouth eyes,
pull each second through
the pores of my skin
and then back out again.
On any given day
bruises might surface
and raise purple,
my lips swell and bleed,
my eyes drown in on themselves.
There is no cloth
covering this body,
no color that does not come
from under the skin.

Water at Night

The moon on the water
is thousands and thousands of little silver fish
quickly and silently
slipping together,
fish without water
in the largest shallow bowl,
so much silver as to keep and move
the boats that are grounded there.

I watch the black night water
beneath us
with you sitting beside me
on that pier
on that ocean
still and not moving
like we both know how to swim it.

That water
is more black than the sky,
deeper and stronger than the earth;
it holds me from turning toward you,
touching you,
saying, "Let's go in."