

TAIJE SILVERMAN

Philtrum

/fɪltrəm/ 1. the vertical groove on the surface of the upper lip, below the nose.

I.

Paper boat, rift
in the water.

Deft bluff
of a thumb.

Misplaced teardrop,
left to dry.

Cool cleft
of the river bed.

II.

Before we are born, the angel of God comes to the womb
and teaches us everything. How the lung books in scorpions
let them breathe, and the nature of a galaxy's greed.
Whole memories and the words for each piece of the world.

Then birth. And the angel returns as our mothers
begin to suffer, silences cells as our mothers beg.
Push, someone urges, and *almost*, while inside
the angel traces a finger from the nose to the top lip, so when
we enter our lives, all we were taught is forgotten.

III.

Inside my mother I knew the shape and history of the tundra.
I knew the sound of mollusks as they fidget into pearls.

I knew how the color blue was made,
and why the ocean didn't trust it.

I knew the shy longings of salamanders. I knew the symphonies
that turtles heard, in some afternoon dreams.

I knew each dream of death and its fish shape, its lopped
and odorless trace. Sometimes I played them like dominoes.

Sometimes I marched the future onto windowsills, propped certain
summers like painted soldiers, to protect the imaginary street.

Sometimes I sang Frank Sinatra into the thought of seedpods.
I hummed my mother's lullabies into the thought

of morning glories, then I whistled
into the thought of them dying as the day wore on.

I poured time into the thought of milk saucers, and I lapped it.
I swallowed the thought of rocks.

IV.

Envelope
for the kiss.

Spoon
of scent.

It culls
the breath

from lovers,

lulls
them in.

V.

When I knew everything, those few wrong days
that waited sleepless in the future

—walking home from the neuro-oncologist's or
the blunt surprise taste of an older boy's thumb—

those days furled into the days surrounding to become
a single conch shell, glassy and earlobe pink.

I held the thought of this shell and listened to its sea sound,
the combers simmering into sun from the salt surface of sea.

VI.

Only the angel regretted it, taking the knowledge back.
I didn't want to keep what I had learned.

Nor did I want to lose it. But I did not mumble *Wait*,
in that language an angel understands.

And I did not feel bereft when the knowledge left me,
when forgetfulness filled into oxygen, pulling the veins.

The angel grazed a finger across my face,
soothing a groove into the plain of skin. *That*

was what I wanted: to be touched.