

1st Place:

Daniel Blokh

Birmingham, AL

To My First Language

Old dog, I don't have time to take you
on walks anymore. I try to throw you bones
but you're a slow thing, heaving to my side
when I am lonely, low growl faltering.
My new dog comes at a finger's snap. He's cuter.
He has sharper teeth.
He watches you lumber through the yard and waits.

I wonder if one day he'll kill you,
drag your body to my room
where I will try to mourn it, softly,
slide my hands through faded
fur. My parents taught me how to love you
so I could feed you when they left us.
They dreamed about the two of us alone
in this big house, this makeshift model of a homeland, yard
where they pictured snow, imagined winters
coming over us, your body around mine
for heat.

2nd Place:

Emily Tian

North Potomac, MD

Clean

and in the shower, a hollow attempt to wash
away, the slick eddy taking

a fraction of the body, and i let it, as you
do with things of this violence.

water rinsing claret; unholy made unwhole.
orchard of my body. equal parts crabgrass and

splinter, hands cupping small tangerines. this isn't
womanhood. this is a bear trap, the season

here too early. what good will come out of this
but learning to cut words on the ticking blade of the hour?

there is so much i could work myself to being: i want limbo,
like the ligaments of hurricaned trees almost

forgetting the timbermen. i want
jealousy. to be a cruel beached

mammal. i want to harpoon and be harpooned.
i want to be afraid: to be sawed into inky steaks

and to stain the afternoon black. when captains go home
to their wives the blood on their hands will not be theirs.

understand, there are no victories.
i want someone to take my fat and make light.

3rd Place:

Bronwen Brenner

New York, NY

The Sickest Daughter

I wanted to be one of those girls who caught salamanders
Came back home with them writhing between her fingers
Waded knee deep and let leeches latch to her white birch legs
Gashes in her skin torn by thorns, mottle of sumac
Throttle of an old dog with cataract eyes, jaw shot off
By a man with a fish hook in his foot and untrusty sawed off
But I live on in a bed with an ornate and creaky frame
On the nightstand: a glass salt shaker full of lavender and thistle
A silver brush with horsehair bristles, bone needle lace, a pillbox
I am glowing celadon in the poor light, there is vomit on my collar
The parakeets are afraid of me, feathers fall away
From pink skinlets and flutter with my hair clumps
When the draft blows in through the white vinyl clapboards
I cough and my darlings scream like pit ponies who forgot sunshine
My raw gums glisten red, canned cherry pie filling
When mama sees me she rattles, empty aluminum can she is
Blooming carnations in a nation of carnal frustration
She wears silver slippers and spits witty quips, but she is ill equipt
For dealing with shit like this, she says, and she
makes jars of preserves for men with turquoise rings
Unneutered pit bulls, and unnerving ideologies
She is spread too thin, she cannot preserve me