



SARAH STERN

Soup

She hung laundry in the backyard  
the way she did many things—  
there was sadness in the inquiry—  
but also a fiery freedom, like yes,  
we're still here, you bastards.

And the bastards were any number  
of beings across time. The bras  
and sweatpants, her flowered dresses,  
her husband's work shirts, the socks she darned.

All of the pieces in the sun  
somehow brought the sea and shells  
and what we started to remember.

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I can tell by the way he enjoys  
his soup with his shirt off  
that this is a man who stops at  
nothing for pleasure.

I'm across the street on the opposite fire escape  
thinking about pleasure—how we're all vessels  
porcelain bowls, ornate, sweet and savory.

The traffic below, humming along  
on the avenue. The soup, the shirt  
the vertical light across the afternoon.

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The first thing he says to the cow each morning is,  
"Hi, honey, how was your evening?"  
Trudy looks back at him, lifting her head.  
Her face is black with a wide white blaze  
that drops down her nose,  
reminding him that he is a small creature.

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How do we let our bodies dance?  
Like this, she said.  
We don't let anything—it happens—  
the swing of it, in the middle.  
I wish I could let go, not realize I'm moving,  
like water, it knows nothing of itself.  
Shadow too, across the stairs, it knows nothing  
of its long lines that move ahead of us.