

# *Hummingbird Abecedarian*

Aimee Nezhukumatathil

Arriving with throats like nipped roses, like a tiny bloom fastened to each neck, nothing else cuts the air quite like this thrum to make the small dog at my feet whine and yelp. So we wait—no excitement pinned to the sky so needled and our days open full of rain for weeks. Nothing yet from the ground speaks green except weeds. But soon you see a familiar shadow hovering where the glass feeders you brought inside used to hang because the ice might shatter the pollen junk and leaf bits collected after this windiest, wildest of winters. Kin across the ocean surely felt this little jump of blood, this little heartbeat, perhaps brushed across my grandmother's mostly grey braid snaked down her brown neck and back across the Indian and the widest part of the Pacific ocean, across the Mississippi, and back underneath my patio. I've lost track of the times I've been silent in my lungs, quiet as a salamander. Those times I wanted to decipher the mutter rolled off a stranger's full and beautiful lips. I only knew they spoke in Malayalam—my father's language—and how terrific it'd sound if I could make my own slow mouth ululate like that in utter sorrow or joy. I'm certain I'd be voracious with each light and peppered syllable winged back to me in the form of this sort of faith, a gift like xenia offered to me. And now I must give it back to this tiny bird, its yield far greener and greater than I could ever repay—a light like zirconia—hoping for something so simple and sweet to sip.