

~vantage~

by aksania xenogrette

her green eyes cast out
a mile through the
tinted glass wall
in the arrival room

our first son marvin
flying up from california,
he sent pictures
holding fat stringers
of brook trout.

i remember the summer i thought
the whole world was mine to eat,
i demanded she fuck me
with whore spit on my cock.

the same night marvin,
weighing all of 113 lbs
shouted, up the stairs,
i'll fucking kill you.

me in my prime, full of fine
sauce and late lunches, ambling
down the stairs one leg at a time,
lead belly of a hundred mile pond,
tall like every elk, every writ
mounted, downed, dressed,
old boys and hand shakes hard won.

grain towers, whiskey nights
out-lasting, the quarry, the grange,
long in the tooth, tongue smooth,
the light in a charming man's eye.

bypasses, blue laws, water rights
the drink too busy, afternoons
my suit, my roots sunk

in the court typist's panties.
the taste of her candy-drop lips.

i came home smelling like
fucking, in my stupor,
i thought it any other night.
down the steep stairs to piss
i would hold the banister,
and turn the corner,
sit down on the toilet
a chisel in my temples
sour mash mouth dry
burning eyes closed
a swimming

from the bottom of the stairs, marvin
screams like a horse in lighting
leave this house or I'll kill you

marvin, all sinew and virtue
knuckles like a maple knot, hard
summers spent splitting stone,
penny nails pulled from busted pallets,
knocked straight with a claw hammer

he punched me in the bladder.
then he punched me in the throat.
he kicked me in the thigh.
my legs gave out, he
clutched my hair in his fist.
gave me a blackout thump,
for good measure,

i could smell it,
my scalp split on
that same damn nail,
i hammered down 20 times,
it kept coming loose
that warped floorboard
i never should have tacked in

when i built this house.
it always squeaked
at the base of the stairs
when i snuck in at night.

 i beat the hell out of marvin,
one last time, later that summer.
my heart almost gave out, i split my
knuckles. bruised for three weeks.
all these years later, my ring finger
still clicks just lifting a fork,
the lord blessed that boy with
a granite skull and cheekbones
even my gnarled fists
couldn't crack.

 that summer i left rachael, my wife,
mother of our five daughters, and three sons.
now i live in this double-wide, it smells like dust
and microwave dinners. i prick myself and soak up a drop
and i stick a little paper tab into the monitor
it beeps a number. my damn blood sugar.
i sit on the couch with a popsicle.
this woman on the television
is waxing her legs, with nair,
white lily and desert rain.

 now i tilt at windmills
like a one eyed bull.
and i will drift
down river
forever.

 was it bourbon,
or my own black soul
possessed me...

 last reunion, i am
sick this late summer, 76
driving my old lumber truck

up this narrow road blasted into
the cliffs along the reservoir

my daughters and sons gather
in the yard of that old blue house,
their daughters and sons from the city,
gutting fish, and running through sprinklers.

cake stuck in my throat,
rachael's green eyes,
curls still falling
like black grapes
from her forehead

smoking on our stone porch,
she cuts a green stick
for our daughter's daughter's daughter
to hold, roasting a hot dog
over the coals.

i think a little later on,
a few more sunsets to reflect,
i'll take a good long
nip on the old bottle
and point the barrel
into my temple, and
pull the trigger.

