

Shirley Ave.

by Emily Hopkins

What can I offer you, White Moon?

This full night lays black before your stoic assent—and I

breathe my final breath, frantic—for you. I wait, damned,
a bestial lover in the broken dark of the variety market, whispering

a word of forgiveness to an empty window. I am reflected
the way Boston's dirty refuse, violates, floats

in the jasmine rice piled round in my grandmother's red-dipped lotus
bowl. Simple

ceremonies of the old women she keeps in her kitchen, in her
bedroom, in her still dark hair tied

tight in lace ribbon. She serves rolled cabbage leaves fat and sweet
in fish and

ginger. Bitter

is the taste of memory before it is forgotten. But tonight, White
Moon,

I sacrifice my life to you. On my street where you lie
in the cold cracked asphalt and gray mutilated filth. Rise among
these remnants

of rice vapor and smoked tobacco, skins of my people linger, all
hallucination and ghosts. In the doorway, a toothless beetle grins,
perched on the cracked seat of a three-legged stool. Alive,
my grandfather stands with arms spread open. He is black and white

like his photo on the shelf above his wife's used bed. His body
burns

in the heat of your blood shadow. Blue and yellow and red,

his flesh drips from him in melted strips. Illuminated,
I wrap my arms into his falling, charring, splitting remains. And the
beetle

laughs: Chirchi! Chirchi! Chirchi! No. There is no beetle. And my grandfather is ash in the turned ground of Cambodia.

But you, White Moon, were there. Did you bathe him then as you light my way now?

I curse you! May you never rise again.

Such are the visions of men before they die; before I take death into myself. So many graves we tread on with feet sore and blistered and unclean. It has always been your way—this way—when did I have a choice? Not beneath your effulgent light.

But Sorrow, I leave you my daughter. Does such compassion surprise you? Even a dead father will mourn his child.

I hold a stolen gun and my hand is heavy with all the weight of ending. I am your weapon, forged by your night, raw and hard as the steel I carry. But, the night is made

from all things violent and tender. I pull the trigger while you shine like a target upon the boy I am to kill. Oh, White Moon!

Don't fail me now. Don't turn from us, when all I have is this. He runs, loud and heavy, panting and begging—if I could hear, he would be praying. My shot is wide.

Because he turns to smile at me, I know him—this other boy of the street gangs and things that have no reason after death. He staggers but does not fall,

while his heart still beats and his chest bleeds a path to me. Are you disappointed?

I am afraid! He will live

with words of recognition, but you, White Moon, where are you now? I run.

Above, on the sloped rooftops, the teenage girls watch and are silent. Women of the moon do not speak of murder. And

one day my daughter will climb upon that roof, and
dance and dance and dance under you,
White Moon. But she will not know me then. Tonight,
I ensure she will never be visited by your cool welcome. She, who is
of the festival of dragon and fruit and flowers
that rain from the clear chasm in the great sky, opened
by all the lost souls. Opened by me, her young
father who could not leave you. She, who is
of the weeping edge of the gold Cambodian moon. She, who is
of Shirley Ave. meeting forever into the coming ocean.
And I flow from The Ave.

