

Hush

by Jane Flett

Hush.

Teach yourself to be quiet as a crouched refugee beneath tarp, keep your mouth closed, inhale with your pores. Coral the circus ponies that click their hooves to your heartbeat. Slow the rumbling tom tom, tell the painted shaman there's no howl brewing in your throat's percolator.

It is time for the wall to win.

When the cackles string across your heart like a volleyball net and you crouch to punt—stop. Let the ball skid into the white sand, let it sketch a map of ocean currents for you to wait by with a balsa liferaft, wait.

You do not need to keep striving.

You think you are a perpetual motion machine, free of thermodynamic law. I'm telling you, you're wrong. Left in peace, your marble will seize on its string. Left in peace, gravity will weigh down your hummingbird fingers.

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I whisper, *I hear you, I know.*

I whisper, *I'm trying.*

Still, the hoards batter at my barricades. Still, the words well up and fill my mouth like maggots, thick and squirmy. Spit them at your feet or gag. Spit them out or swallow a roiling waterfall to keep in my belly.

You think when I close my mouth I am quiet? Perhaps your chest is not beset by buzzards, cawing, snatching beakfuls of flesh. Beneath my skin is a skyscraper city in the chaos of the commute: carhorns and ringtones and sticking escalators. Running late for the meeting that will make her. Laddered tights. Garbage rotting in Chinatown's August sidewalks and a pointed heel waiting to slip. The back of the bus, juddering; the smoke from the exhaust. The cacophony.

You think when I close my mouth I am quiet?

I am trying; I look to the wall.

You hear a distant church bell tink in another village and smile, benevolent, at my clanging.

