Like Water

by Jen Knox

There are no hands outstretched, no reassuring words when I fall. My body becomes liquid, like Bruce Lee said, only it's not quite water. I close my eyes and am back in my room, practicing, knowing that next time the boys won't knock me to the ground. Next time my hands will move so fast their eyes won't know where to settle. I will block blows and twist their arms into pretzels, but I will let them go.

My body is seizing now. I am sinking into the floor, spreading on the linoleum. No one is supposed to be here, but I feel pressure. I am water, and I am earth. There is nothing more pristine.

My father's fist pounds my chest. The pills tickle the ground as he kicks them away. His “Why, Son? Why?” jars me, makes my legs heavy again, not like air, not fluid, and I open my eyes. The world is solid, bright. There are boys waiting for me at school. They're still there, and I need more training. I studied Jeet Kune Do, practiced all summer. I thought I was ready, but when I saw them today, I turned home.

I want to tell Dad why, explain, but he won't stop. And when I sit up, coughing, stomach upside-down, I begin to cry. I become a lake, a river, a stream, an ocean that will one day be able to move anything, anyone. I just need more time.

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