**Schrödinger’s Cat in Late Summer**

*Para Argentina, una vez más*

Courtney Justus

I.

It started with the question

of whether a thing you cannot see is still

breathing within four walls.

Or maybe it started with the twirling girls

outside the glass pane door, their chestnut hair

and duck-face selfies, and metallic eye shadow.

Or maybe with your striped polo, the tomato vines

by the side door, dirt on my knees, mouths damp.

You were my first, at seventeen, you

twenty, tattooed but not tattered.

You lowered your lips to my forehead

and murmured todo a su tiempo.

That morning, we boiled

fettuccini, talked metaphysics

and Schrödinger’s cat, because if we were ever

going to talk science and pasta

with each other, it was now, that summer

and then never again.

In the cab home, legs threaded

through shins as we passed

the train tracks, the red boxcars that

always scared me a little for reasons

I couldn’t explain, mothers boarding

with plastic grocery store bags

and children by the hand.

I gave the driver our wrinkled ten-peso

bills, walked eight blocks by

blurring kioscos, the fruit store where

another day I might pause over

a lemon or a peach, its bruises tiny

circles like bent coins beneath flesh.

II.

At summer’s end, we climbed the river

cliffs, brackish water whistling

below the scalloped rocks where you slept.

In the whipping morning wind, I heard

dropped *es*’s and rolled r’s, the hacking j’s

that stuttered on my tongue once.

Now I slide them along teeth and tongue

like small stones between my fingers.

In middle school, I stuttered

over my friend Rodrigo’s name, every

syllable a curb upon which my narrow

foot collided, skin on concrete on skin.

Until one day, both of us fourteen, Rodrigo

blocked the circle, counted cards, said

that I should stand somewhere else, counting

the days before leaving that school

like stained pencil nubs collecting in my backpack.

I do not count syllables anymore.

The first time a boy almost

kissed me, Tang with vodka

rivered through my stomach,

blue club lights swaying.

The man in the white T-shirt, the man

who knew I wasn’t eighteen, must

have known, slurred *Why won’t the American*

*drink beer* into my ear, just above

my long glass earrings, like icicles made of ocean.

When his lips only brushed mine,

I told myself it didn’t count.

My eyeshadow still

a sterile blush on my lids.

There’s always a difference between

refusal and being refused.

III.

People call me the Argentinean girl, but I am

only half the girl in a sunlit kitchen and half

of what makes a boy unbend.

Can I be both things at once?

The girl who wraps her legs around you

and the girl who still says no?

You, your taste all smoke and mate

and peaches and red meat.

And I in your kitchen drinking lemon tea.

Sometimes I dream I am

at your window asking for more

sugar, for more space, saying *Do not*

*touch me there, please.*

I would take your cigarette

in one hand and lowered it

to the damp ground like an offering.