**Aubade with North Korean Mother**

Esther Ra

She touches his shoulder. Under the cool bonelight

of the moon, her hand is flimsy, almost transparent.

The day before, under the sun, she had sighed aloud

and said, *At least when Dear Leader Kim Jung Il*

*was alive, we had something to eat. But now…*

And now. His eyes snap open. Jolting awake.

She smiles calmly, with effort, but her lips have gone

white with fear. Someone is knocking: a small, soft tap

that resounds through his chest like a dirge. *Umma*,

he whispers, the word sharp in his mouth. *I’ll be back*,

she says, smoothing his hair. He squeezes his eyes shut,

disbelieving. He tells himself he must be dreaming.

She is not moving softly across the slant floor, not

into the openmouthed dark. Not losing her name,

not losing her face, not vanishing into the loving arms

of her country without at least combing her hair, perhaps,

or packing her bags, or turning back to whisper a goodbye.