**Sweat, Tears, or the Sea**

Jennifer Avignon

*“Do you know a cure for me?”*

*“Why, yes,” he said. “I know a cure for everything. Salt water.”*

*“Salt water?” I asked him.*

*“Yes,” he said, “in one way or another. Sweat, tears, or the salt sea.”*

*—Isak Dinesen*

I.

i grow succulents all year round.

in summer i keep the pots on the roof.

i lean out the window, the sill pressing

into my hips, to water them.

the plants come inside before the first frost,

and as bright, wet heat descends again,

they go back to the roof

one by one, carried through the window,

my skin sticky with sweat.

succulents are a good metaphor for something:

if you tear them apart, they only multiply.

squirrels ate mine in the fall,

the gnawed brown stumps

sprouting anew in the winter sun.

broken-off leaves sprout, too.

II.

the weight of memory is heavy some days.

i carry self-awareness like a backpack,

and must sometimes seek release

from the kind of person i am choosing to be.

the space inside my head is close-packed.

i make myself claustrophobic,

and when i am too much,

i tear myself apart.

finding a seam, i pull,

telling myself that i will embark on a journey of repairs,

emerging stronger,

that the weeping will be worthwhile,

but i don’t think i believe me.

III.

i have sailed the Caribbean,

lived by the Atlantic,

stared at the place where the Mediterranean meets the sky,

and as i drive toward the Pacific, i know

that getting away solves nothing, but

when hot sand presses against my back,

i watch the gulls wheel and dip,

my skin glowing under the sun.

and as fragments of seashells slip through my fingers

i know that a solution exists.

no man is an island,

but i am a woman,

and all my borders are oceans.