**And There is a Name for It, Mother**

Marta Regn

Like seed packets saved from springs

 before me, I am morninged,

pened like a thumbprint in soil, in a row,

 receiving. I follow my mother,

brush back topsoil, water the spaces

 where she stops, trusting that the seeds

remained though they disappeared

to my eyes. This is the lesson of the garden

 that stays on my fingers long after we leave.

At night, as a child, my hand would sweep

 summer sweat from my face.

This was when we still lived without

 air conditioning. Under my nose

were brown crescent moons, dirt

 permanently in my nail beds. At any moment

now, if I try, I can hear my mother’s voice.

 She says the best earth for growing

is a dark sweet sponge, like chocolate cake

 crumbles, humus made by a litter of leaves

and the last animal lives: decay

 that gives us something back.

Growing up, she fed me on lettuce

 full of fluorescent green cabbage worms

tucked in the leaves; beet hummus

 she made the last color in a sunset; tomatoes

every day; zucchini that lived well

 into the winter, dust still clinging

to its itchy skin like the hair on my legs

 when I attempted to shave

for the first time. When I learned

to cook (quietly and suddenly),

 I began to smell the vegetables

that lined the kitchen counter—

 a test for dirt, an inhaled indicator

of what my mother had washed,

 or what was unwashed. So many things

I’ve pulled from the ground to stand at the sink

 and scrub: vegetables for a lifetime.

Much of my memory I am unsure of,

 but some of me is still deep in my hands.

I am habitually behind steam rising

 from a faucet. I sense I’m still outside.

I sense that I’ve lived at the center

 of a drain stopped up with potato skins.

I was a child once: my hands, evidence

 of this. Before chopping,

cutting, cooking, shaving, changing

 and changing and changing,

I am in a garden with my mother,

 the smell of paper packets feathering

in my fingers, the smell of a storm summoned

 by the wind. Just like before my mother

was an environmentalist, to me

 she was my mother, a woman, who led me

in the garden, taught me scientific names

 after common names.

Just like before there is memory

 stored in scent, there is the scent

before there is a name for it,

 and there is a name for it, I know.

*Geosmin*: a bicyclic terpene,

 responsible for dirt-smell, earth-smell,

beet-smell. Responsible for me.

 Responsible for *petrichor*, the air-smell

before rainfall; or, me, on the evening-dark

 screen porch, picking stringy ends of snap pea

pods, the thunderheads coming so close

 to the garden. From the Greek, *petra*, stone,

*ikhṓr*, the ethereal fluid,

like rocks swept by water, flying

 through air like its liquid,

like my dirty hands in the sink, like

 my mother tracing my steps through the rows

I watered behind her, like

 we arrived here by walking backward.