**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.