

unteachable, relentless, what we may never fathom

when she teaches you in the slow yawn of
midnight, in the youth of your prime, recipes not
from books but from memory and a yearn of past
tongue— a metaphor for her immigration story
(waters displaced from a mighty weight)—when the
front yard blooms in the dogged boredom of spring and
summer and you know she doesn't know floriography,
much less the very language you speak, when that woman
you've known from birth cups and cradles your baby
cheeks, pinching down an earlobe, crooning the sounds
that you could never translate properly (now words on
a screen)—soothing the relentless knocking and ache
beneath the dead of your sternum— when a high school
assignment demands you rehearse a novel you've never
opened (a pot of family resistance and unspoken history—
sunflower yellow river simmering from voice)
and you listen intently, knowing you'd reproduce
that story into consumable form, when she tells you in the
car that the family you know now is from the cultural
necessitation of ancestry and trees and a river's
relentless path from china to canada, but, still, she stays
and endures, when the low murmur of her fingertip trails
along the family tree, cutting off right before her name
(except, there is no name) and she writes you two down
in with the impermanence of shaky pencil graphite,

when she still has the pictures of your elementary
classes taped on the aging wall— above is her
wedding picture, framed, elegant in the way
motherhood wasn't— when she pays for the
drinks but still slyly slides hers over to you when
she hadn't even started, explaining it all away as
dislike, when that woman you can hate at times
apologises her way through a plate of cut fruit, intending
a peaceful closure to the warzone you two
inadvertently introduced into the house, like the
sole incense candle stuck into the ashtray inviting
back the red and gold fortune you two tossed away resentfully,
like orange lilies, pink larkspurs, and tansies bundled together
and now chest-caged, like whistler wind seeping through a
forgotten open window (and water warps the sill),

you can almost hear a mother's love in the lingering
memory of metaphors and isolation, and you can almost touch the
faint borders of an unteachable word that constantly challenges
and challenges you—the same way nerium feels on the tongue or
the same way water isn't meant to be held forever—igniting you with
the imperial fear of having to love somebody back