

AISHVARYA ARORA

Mr. Time

fucks with my notions of memory. cranks the key

in the back of girlhood
like a wind-up toy
till it tenses, stumbles at me.

selfish mr. time
drives by in girlhood.
borrowed car. speeding red streak.

i hide at the side of the highway
where peonies poppies straw flowers mumble

about the difference between blooms & openings. sleep
& dreams. tits & breasts. now, on me

they're a chest.
spread flat. taught
to do that.

like the bed sheet K soothed
with the flat of their hand.

palmed & smacked. till it shivered like that.
till the springs inside creaked.

how pedestrians cluck at the sidewalk florist
for a more reasonable rate on woodside ave.

how when i met K, i spoke from inside
my binder flattened chest. a dream i achieved

where never was ambition attached.

luck & discovery. invention
& inheritance. like my father, after every meal i take dessert.

like my brother i take clippers at a 1 from my nape to my temples.
like my grandfather, i divulge only when asked. ask again. ask me

if i always knew.

patriarch of my backpack, i pack it full of hungers.
spearmint to gnaw. a forged letter that says

i am the washed sidewalk's favorite boy
wet from the florist's hose & spray.

i remember.

i change.

i dew across my memories, cooling daylight.

i waft across your imagination like grass
after the mower's engine cuts.

what else could grow & die here?

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I am not trying to be a man how

men are not trying to be me either,
yet on moving day slim silver mirrors
ditched on the sidewalk reflect stars

that are planes, that i wish on, wish
i knew why the silver-haired man
at the auto shop was so butch

slipping his gold-ringed fingers under
the subaru, humming like a cd
in the disc drawer, his bronze hoop & hair

match my lover, my boyfriend,

who is not trying to be a man either,
yet so handsome are we, when wives gather,
we cleave to the boys, find

the conversation boring. once i fail
at every dream, how free i will be. fear
& desire burrow in me like lyrics i misremember

to august's queer ear worm, singing, i climb
six flights with the wrong keys jingling
my carabiner, the mismatched key & door

long for nothing, fear nothing.

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