

Jenna Le
AUNT QUANG'S MEMOIRS

At home, I was called "Little Brother,"
not just by my older siblings
but by my parents too. I was everyone's
little brother, everyone's fool.

Ma gave me bowl haircuts.
She said they flattered my face:
I had a low forehead, pointy chin,
eyelashes thick
as black mosquito netting,
always slick with the pond-slime
of recent sleep.

My nose was bulbous, enormous
like a catamaran.
"That snout,
you inherited from him,"
Ma ominously whispered, gesturing at
the smoky parlor doorway.

As an afterthought, she added:
"Mind that you don't make it even bigger
by picking your nose, you filthy thing!"
I was nearly as rattled by her scolding
as that one time
she accused me of masturbation...

Ma dressed me in blue shirts, blue trousers.
She signed my pink-dressed sister Huong and me
up for ballroom dancing lessons.
“You, stand over here,” she said,
gripping my shoulder hard,
and directed me to waltz my big sister
around the living room for hours.

Huong sighed that it made her feel
all grown up and feminine,
dancing the western dances
like Marie Antoinette.

I felt like a whole pig
dangling from a neck-hook
at the Asian grocery,
its genitals clearly visible
but stripped of significance.

Jenna Le
PASO DOBLE

As the only daughter
of a famed castrato
and a vestal virgin
who, by tumbrel, was wheeled
to a death most lugubrious
in the depths of Vesuvius,
I'm no stranger to sacrifice.
Humor me. Peeled

like a mandarin orange
and chained to the corners
of a four-poster bed,
I am eager to yield.
You have my attention.
My vows of abstention
are done with. Meet Lady
Godiva, high-heeled.

O bogus surgeon,
I'll create a diversion,
while your getaway car
whisks you far afield.
I'll be your fish bait,
your bullfighting cape,
your mosquito magnet,
your human shield.