

## WAVES/CURRENTS

I. barracuda flesh meets the grill like a  
craved kiss marks mellow cheeks. the  
summer of 2015, ngapali beach. three  
peacocks wade into indian blue: *kyi than*  
binds to my shallow arms and *may may*  
hooks the bulk on my hips. grounded  
sand, a mirage of roots, as though the  
floor could hollow beneath us, urchins  
tucked in coral's cradle. we share wet  
laughs and *kyi nyo* takes photos from  
shore, the ones in the black scrapbook.



II. at a river house in hlaing, five sisters  
claim separate corners. the eldest counts  
grey threads on her scalp, three spools  
worth since the students roared again.  
on a *khittote* up the sorry stairs, one  
*nye ma* drifts to diophantine equations  
and the measured lull of her dialysis  
machine. another silences shrimp against  
the curve of granite, pestle clenched by  
fingers laced with loose garlic from dry  
country. those same hands that glide  
*thanaka* on supple skin will slaughter  
chickens in the courtyard. youngest of  
seven squints low, down to the township  
through an ajar window. green one tallies

motorbikes in english (two dozen), stalls  
of *kyae oh* (four) and fishermen on the jetty  
(twelve). an odd onyx-tressed girl twirls on  
bare feet, wrists writhing to absent strings,  
her fickle form of flight. bewitched beyond  
the frame, the youngest billows to the deck  
and joins her lucid-eyes shared in semblance.  
*thabin* wears a line taut from silence, snaps

her gaze back to vast idle sky. chest meets  
the sea, those sirens now hollering. the girl  
unfurls into a sprint, some cataclysmic event.  
out, out against that jagged floor, toward the  
dragging maw of frosted foam and dead meat.



**III.** the last time the boy told me he loved me,  
on the overpass underneath the white light  
at the turn of the road, i kissed him wholly  
dazed. cascading waves of rubber beneath  
four feet–truck drivers push home, parents  
hoist heavy heads, sunken kids swell out  
into the roused night–two hearts fold like  
ghosts, bygone at the banks of lore/myth.  
muddied brown eyes, bellow of concrete  
currents, of tires, we fool ourselves to bed.



**IV.** five years of waging wars for ceasefires,  
we crept a key under the mat and left the  
men at the house by the coast. bruised tubs  
of our lives slumped desperate to the door,  
*may may* and I pressed forth to the seaside.

wordless, we climbed muttonbird island,  
our bodies light with loaned promise. the  
eastern winds shrieked for new bones. on a  
bench at the summit, *may may* perched her  
worn limbs, the force of change settling in

the blood. for the first time in five years,  
undone tears trailed for hues of sunset.  
we were phantoms long forsaken, born  
to a nameless tide. half moon as witness,  
our shadows swallowed the road home.

V. shaded by white wings of umbrellas,  
i dance along the mouth of the resort  
swimming pool in a lilac rash shirt.  
*luu kye* exchange wordy commotion  
but i am the firstborn of a famed circus  
master! one ready click and my legs are  
obtuse triangles, straight as a marshall's  
whistle, braving baited sharks at some  
cornerstone cove; or rather, this vat is  
my cauldron! brimming with burnt durian  
husks and left slippers and curls of caught  
crushes. with a cry in sacred tongue, brew  
bubble bath clockwise five times over  
and bombshell in – the virgin sacrifice!  
weightless before heaven, admiring sweet  
whispers of sun filter through cold chlorine.  
i imagine the flurry of rising froth is riot  
soda pop, a dollar eighty from a sidestreet  
cart. my breath returns, *ba ba* soaked with  
glazed crimson eyes. the *luu kye* grip my  
wrists and scold me in burmese tongue.



VI. somewhere in time, *ba ba* still visits the  
bathhouse. almond skin steeped in suds,  
back scars wavering under rippled water.  
retired ship captain trades salt burns for  
an early night on peppered earth. seven  
short blasts, abandon ship, please come  
home. old-god stars blink out of existence.

*ba ba* dries off in baked air, and wrings out  
a song (“*a hnin neik hmar tha yet ywet*”).  
sand falls out his mouth like blistered tea,  
a gurgle and sniper spit. *ba ba* greets his  
jungle friends, they re-adjust cotton *longyi*  
and speak of wars and wages on wet soil.  
stone-mouthed men ash paper cigarettes.

somewhere in space, there is no river of  
red—only full rose syrup in the cupboard.

in the other universe, *ba ba* sleeps hours  
and hours, leaden brackish air, no blanket.  
no drawn shower curtain—still and unfazed.  
cicadas thrum a lament while water creeps  
on concrete floors, his skewed head at rest.

the dull drone of a faucet running, no quiet  
tap of thagyamin's call. crackles from the  
radio, chants from saffron robes. somewhere  
*tharlay* runs fast and *ba ba* catches up to him.

