

Sheila Sanderson

Tectonics

If the bone at the base of the neck is Formosa,
the scar of the burn on my back
is the mainland of China,
the Manchurian Plain,
the Yangtze Gorge marked in white.
Raw it had been the fiercest
three colors of sunset,
which meant I knew what fire could do.

Which means I can't exactly say
I didn't know what I was doing
in those days after he died,
the heartache too hot and brimming skin-level,
and me feeling for where it hurt most;
then me inking places
that could be made to hurt more,
some one place to show myself,
show whatever had elected him and not me,
what I could do, what I would do.

One of the heron figures I'd twisted
from paper-clips
got snatched up and held over the gas,
went orange to white, started singing
up its wire legs through the skin of my fingers,
made me remember how a burn
doesn't hurt past the nerves,
that years ago, even ablaze and hours afterward
it hadn't.

It was weeks of salve and wincing and gall,
the cracking lava plain of scab,
its fault-lines and upheavals
like continents trying to make up their minds,
the body righting itself from underneath.

The heart was already railing
in conversation with the body;
no conceivable notion of alignment or division
was going to equal
what is destined to keep looking
for its proper shape.
Like forces underground
under the ocean,
grief manages its own deformity.