

## Sleeve of Memory

He taught me no  
two blows sound the same,  
a ringing still lives in my ear  
singing a song called

*be quiet*. I've hidden his gold rings  
in my throat, near  
the little boy—his face buried  
in his palms, ready to catch

not tears but the butterflies  
his stomach  
spills from his eyes—we share  
a body that doesn't know

where to run. Neither of us remember  
hearing the word *son*  
or how to embrace someone in the eyes  
when they say, *I love*.

Don't think, *That is such a shame*. It's not.  
To remember things as they  
were is counterintuitive  
for survival. I love my father.

See how I did that. I changed  
the color of the sky by closing  
my eyes & opening a bottle  
he didn't drink. If I were anything

like God, I wouldn't hide in the celestial  
sleeve of memory, I'd retune the heart  
strings of hard men & offer  
them a new language;

where their hands aren't the tool,  
but a tongue. & then CLAP  
like thunder, he'd ask for forgiveness.  
Who, God? Yes, him too.

## This Shit Is Not Interesting

Sometimes when it's this dark,  
I light matches & let them  
burn the tips of my fingers  
while I watch the flame—

this is what I know about memory.  
It flickers when it feels  
like it. I've tried to forget that bare-  
knuckle night I left work,

thanking Nick for the quality  
of his daiquiris. He had  
a toothy smile—he's gone now,  
a story for another night.

Though I should've stayed  
for another drink, I went  
to meet Slim before the achy chills  
started from my neck

down to the soles of my feet.  
Here, I'd like to remind you  
of the time Richard Pryor lights  
a match, you know, at the end

of *Live on the Sunset Strip*,  
he says, *What is that? Richard Pryor*  
*running down the street*, & just like  
that we're taught to admire

another man's defeat. People will ask  
their boogeyman to step  
into the light, laugh at the first stone  
thrown—paying for a seat.

This shit is not interesting  
to the ones who know, offstage  
Pryor danced on the teeth  
of his deceits, slipping into spells

of regret. & I, who'd disappeared  
that week, got her text & flew  
across town because I knew  
this time she was serious:

she'd thrown my shit behind  
the dumpster—a place I won't  
soon forget—hold on, let's say a prayer  
for the brothers who don't

make it. God, bless those whose  
hot blood tests the blue lights  
knifing through the night.  
Amen to these men, who bare

teeth at life. Thus, when I turned down  
the one-way on Dorgenois Street,  
the same street nine years later  
I mourned a beloved killed by

a drunk driver, a driver who could  
    have been me, I saw those cops  
& I thought *run* but then thought  
    *gun*. So instead, I pulled over,

thinking, *I'm in for it all right*. Knew it  
    was my turn to boogeyman  
into the light, so I lifted my hands up  
    just right, fingers spread so wide

you might have thought I was aflame.

    I imagine the match Pryor lights  
for the crowd, its sulfur smelled  
    like *good-night*. When I heard 12

close the car door, I felt the weight  
    of Slim's package—  
enough for a bid—wedged  
    in my waistband; hidden,

unlike the belongings I'd never see  
    again. Then he said, *Move & you're done*.  
Before I blinked, the click  
    of cuffs snapped against

my wrists. He pulled my shirt just so,  
    & I felt the waistband  
flick. *Fuck* fell from my lips  
    as I watched the little bag of powder

drift between me & the 12 with fire.  
    When he smiled, I heard a round  
of applause. Pryor holds the match,  
    & I swear, I see him flinch. I wasn't

surprised when I saw Resisting Arrest  
    on those multicolored sheets.  
Ain't but a few hours of peacocking  
    before I felt that familiar ache—

cold sweats, jonesin', a yearn  
    for death filled my stomach  
as I crouched down near a man,  
    who after thirty minutes of complaining

about his baby momma's expired tags  
    noticed the animal writhing.  
I lie so childlike, I can almost taste  
    my mother's gumbo on Christmas Day,

& how a soft blanket might feel  
    against my skin. I know, I know  
this shit is not interesting  
    unless you know the warmth

that comes when a stranger  
    takes his coat and covers your body  
on a jailhouse floor.