

The moss is the first real elder to tell me *oh*,
how special you are, how wondrous it is that your heart
reaches for reflections. But I look in the mirror

and I only see a face shrouded in crimson chiffon,
bloodshot sclera. My stomach churns. My eldest girl cousin
engaged at nineteen, and each auntie chirped like

a magpie, saying *how beautiful they are!* I press
my fingers to my face and feel for the roundness left. In April
my stomach goes hollow and God's a ghost

in the lining, his book my indictment. In September
across the room I see your face, lady's-slipper-pink in the
party lights, a dryad in elegance, and around each

corner of your body, you're blue and violet and
rose. I'm too afraid to step into the sunrise gradient, where I
might become what I so ardently deny.

A cousin gets married to a girl of barely twenty
and there's baby fat on her face like mine, and I think
that I see her shadow in the mirror. Nanu

pinches my cheeks: *you next?* She doesn't remember
my name, but she sees the curve of my femininity, knows
that I'm made for a man. When I next see you

you've dyed the tips of your hair like seaweed.
There's too much shame in my marrow for you, so bright
and keen and unapologetic, septum ring and

bright beaded necklaces. We go for a walk in
the woods behind DQ and you laugh when the moss
stains your cargos green. I want to ask how

I can learn to peel open my ribcage, let my heart
thrum without reproach. I want to ask how you so flippantly
deliquesce into the tree roots, melt the barrier

between the land and the living. And oh, love,
I wonder what it means that your eyes mirror the sky
and mine only the shadows.

The way you embody a bolder day. If only
you knew how the air quivers like a harp around you,
how your coral nails stir the earth when

you pass. The moss creeps up my boots, saying *oh,*
love, how special you are, but it reaches for your skin like
a parched cactus to water. I don't know how

to love without remorse.