

Past Lives
By Wisteria Deng

In a wild July we biked along the ocean
Before winds could take shape we watched
flights taking off.
Giant metal bellies brushing
against the water.
For a second I wondered if the bird would sink.

Tell me summer love
– Do you think of our past lives as sinking birds?
Each gives birth to a star as they plummet into earth.
Or are they salt crystals crushed in the retreating waves?

One wave carries away our first house, where letters still
arrive years after our flight: envelopes reigning our names
drenched in the evening rain.
Another compiles our defeat, stories stuck in corners
we will never reach. Coins between couch seats,
coxcomb bulbs caught behind the counter,
take-out chopsticks choked down the drain.

The day we parted ways I cracked a tooth that had been aching
for past a decade. Low buzz of pain like a twilight lullaby,
like the mesmerizing spin of a ceiling fan, humming her way
through every stilt house in this tropical island.

The day we parted ways I cracked a tooth that had been mine
until no longer. Lying flat at the dentist's, I tasted metal sinking down my
throat. A quiet prey, I allowed long tools to pry me
open. Water rinsed through numbed flesh that
no longer felt like mine.
All I could hear was the sound of waves retreating
inside me. Each splash a past life sinking beyond my reach.
Each splash a death of us.