Tint Journal

POETRY

Ars Poetica of Holding the Night

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"Mother Ocean" by Mary Tina Shamli Pillay

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for mom (R. 2016), the night is always a kind of shelter

That night, the house became a bowl
I had to hold steady, though my hands
were still learning the shape of anything.

the youngest leaned against my knees,
asking without asking,
is this how silence sounds?

The bulb in the hallway blinked twice,
a tired movement, then steadied —
light insisting on its small duty.

don’t go far, one said,
as if distance had already begun
to gather in the corners

I moved from room to room
like someone counting, not numbers
but breaths, the way a body counts
when it doesn’t trust sleep.

we stayed close,
our shadows touching first
before we did

There was water in a plastic jug,
warm from the day, but it would do —
I passed it around as if it were
something ceremonial, something
we could believe in.

it tastes like nothing,
one whispered,
and I said, good, drink

The night had its own language:
the slow scrape of a chair,
the sputter of a distant generator,
a dog insisting somewhere

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that the world was not yet done.

tell us something,
they said, not knowing
what kind of story survives this

So I made one from fragments —
a morning she once laughed too loud,
a pot that burned because she forgot
and danced instead, a name
she called me that no one else used.

say it again,
they asked,
until the words softened

We did not cry at first.
Grief arrived like heat,
something you feel before
you understand it is there.

I am not cold,
one said,
though their hands were

I gathered them the way
a roof gathers rain,
not stopping it, just holding
what it can until morning.

will she come back,
the smallest asked,
and I said, she is here

because there was no other way
to keep the walls from widening,
no other way to make the dark
believe we were not alone.

we slept in pieces,
stitched together
by the sound of breathing

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And when the first light came,
thin as a promise I did not trust,
I was still there, still counting,
still holding the bowl steady.

look, morning,
one said,
as if we had made it ourselves

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