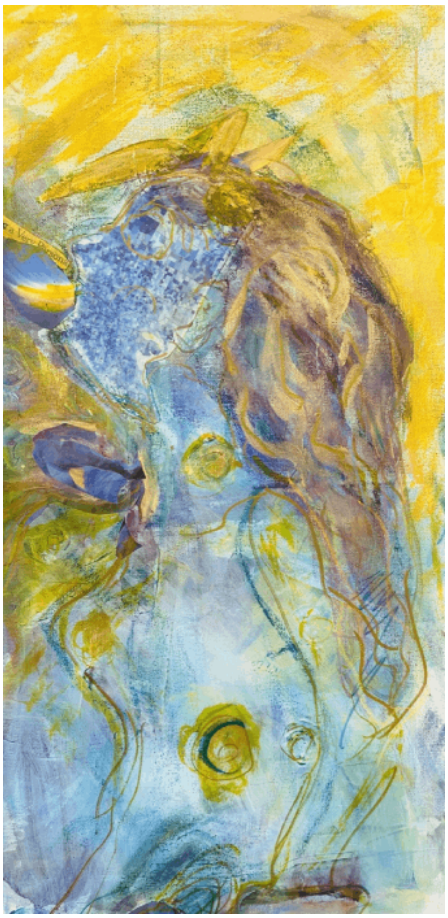
POETRY

Daughter of Bays and Hills

by Penny Wei



"Scream" by Doris Ash

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In my hometown, God takes the shape of a cleaver.
So the first time I lied was to a rooster. I promised

not to watch but its blood arced thin and bright.
There’s a way a cleaver rests when it’s not in use —

forgiveness, if placed right. In the alley behind the tailor’s,
I press my mouth to a girl’s throat and taste chalk.

She wears her brother’s shirt, sun-bleached rope, sleeves
too long. Someone burns joss paper upstairs, someone

is crying, but not for us. She said it was my past life,
a midwife for drowned girls. Somewhere in ??,

South of the clouds, a mountain is named after a
girl who refused marriage. She burned herself and became

the fog that unbuttons your shirt on the hike up.
We barter time by its absences, golden and mid-knot.

Let a man swallow fire and offer me peony from pork
skin, freshest before fear. Take it and let him smile, teeth black.

Say guilt. Say salt. Say your name under running taps, steaming.
Say daughter and hear the door shut behind you. Before

I tasted truth in almond oils Ma rubbed on my joint, I bit
into the pit and cracked a molar. The dentist said I had

an old soul and three cavities. All things will pass through.
A temple ceiling collapses and the gods fall into bowls of

rice. No one prays. Everyone eats.
Everything will end with starch.

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