POETRY

Sugarcane

by Constance Mello



Illustration "Raising Women" by Tamzin Merivale

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My grandmother leads us up the dirt road
The machete in her hand is the length of her torso

(She has gotten shorter, since I was born)

Whoosh-whoosh-whack and the sugar cane goes down
She hands me the stiff bounty

The sticky substance leaks from the cuts
She peels them with the smaller knife

And tells me to chew and spit, chew and spit, the sugar-
y sweetness coats everything, the mouth and the knife

I wonder where she learned to *whoosh-whoosh-whack*,
If it was down the dirt road she tells me about

When she ruminates over sleeping
on straw mattresses as a child.

Years later, in Jodhpur, the van hurries down the wrong side of the road
The driver barely hesitates on the hard-right turn

In the blue city, across the world, and the workers
Invite me under the yellow tarp for a drink

I recognize the long, woody stems, the manual press
The beige sticky liquid that leaks below

They tell me to squeeze the lime into it before I drink it
But I already know

(An echo in my mind,
Whoosh-whoosh-whack)

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